

Forgotten Protagonists: A Feminist Examination of Kavita Kane's Lanka's Princess and Sita's Sister

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DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I hereby declare that the data presented in this Dissertation report entitled, "Forgotten Protagonists: A Feminist Examination of Kavita Kane's *Lankas Princess* and *Sita's Sister* is based on the results of investigation carried out by me in the English Discipline at the Sheno Goembab School of Languages and Literature, Goa University under the supervision of Prof. Nina Caldeira and the same has not been submitted elsewhere for the award of a degree or diploma by me. Further, I understand that Goa University or its authorities will be not responsible for correctness of observations or other findings given the dissertation.

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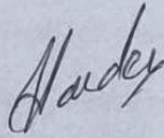
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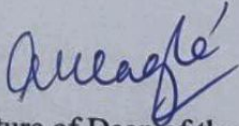
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ABSTRACT

Myths play a crucial role in Indian society, and they are considered as a source of inspiration from the beginning of the time. Contemporary authors like Kavita Kane tries to revisit these myths with a fresh perspective. In patriarchal societies, men have the benefit of being superior to women and were granted the authority to make decisions and to exercise dominance. Through the character of Urmila in *Sita's Sister* and Surpanakha in *Lanka's Princess*, Kavita Kane discusses gender norms and stereotypes. This research analysis Kane's texts from the feminist lens. Kavita Kane presents these mythological female characters from Ramayana in a new light. Furthermore, it discusses variety of themes such agency, autonomy, empowerment etc. This research examines the importance of mythological retellings in literature and appreciates Kavita Kane for introducing feminism to the field of mythological retellings.

Keywords- Mythology, Feminism, Patriarchy, Stereotypes, Ramayana, Themes.

CHAPTER 1 - UNVEILING FORGOTTEN PROTAGONISTS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The term "myth" comes from the Greek word "MYTHOS," which means "story" or "word." The term mythology refers to the study of myths. Myths are evocative tales from a remote past that deal with cosmogony and cosmology. The way characters experience or carry out a set series of events is expressed in mythology. After encountering people from different cultures, myths have the potential to evolve throughout time. A story that has been repeated with variations and contains a supernatural element is called a myth. Though the meaning might take the shape of an allegory, it has an exceptionally powerful potential for significance. Many mythological ideas may be used to understand the origins of myths as well as their significance.

Because literature mimics all three and the roots of the past, present, and future nourish and support each other, culture and society will always exist. Literature is inextricably linked to its rich past. As a result, many authors nowadays keep retelling historical myths and narrating them from the viewpoint of the present. Myths are clever customs about the universe, God, humanity, and society's external conditions, as well as about nature and history. A myth is a story or custom that is supposed to uphold the truth about what it means to be a person in a community. Writers have employed both contemporary and traditional mythological ideas to analyze various myths.

Writers and readers worldwide have found both fascination and inspiration in myths and mythology, which are collections of stories collected into epics or

puranic texts. Indian mythology has a variety of stories that have been passed down through the ages, either orally or via well-preserved writings. Indian mythology tales are very good at delivering strong messages to readers and moulding their personalities. Indian mythology stories aim to teach us nuanced truths, laws, and guidelines to help us in our everyday lives. Myths drawn from the Vedas, Puranas, and Itihasas have remained true to their original meaning despite geographical variations, though there is an addition of local flavour in terms of language, imagery, etc the original essence is retained.

Mythology and folktales have been the very foundation of many cultures and civilizations. The mythical stories across cultures are viewed as an embodiment of beliefs, values and philosophies that serve the national interest of the people. In Western literature, The Bible is the constituent of Christian values and philosophies.

On the other hand, in Indian Literature the Puranas- The Mahabharata and The Ramayana are embraced as the embodiment of Hindu religious commandments. The mythical characters are the symbolic representation of these traditional values and are viewed as a cultural beacon of the nation.

Writers across the world refer to their conventional mythology to address contemporary issues by reinterpreting the past in the light of the present. The twentieth-century poet and critic T.S Eliot in the essay “Tradition and Individual Talent” termed it as “pastness of the past will be present in the future.” The use of myths in literature is not a new phenomenon and this tradition was initiated by Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey.

The mythical characters and themes in Greek mythology were recounted in history as symbolic representations of cultural beliefs, values, prejudices and philosophies. Thus, mythology is perennial and keeps growing in terms of perspectives and connotations. Commonly the myths are resplendent with rich themes and narrative forms. Literary artists from every epoch make use of these themes and forms in their art. These themes and forms have been explored in the works of literary artists of all ages.

Readers have been inspired to revisit the epics by rewritings of Indian and foreign writers from the 21st century who have taken a new perspective on the epics and their many mythological characters, such as Draupadi, Sita, Surpanakha, Urmila, Ravana, Kunti, Karna, Ahalya and others, while also questioning conventional wisdom. Indian mythology has piqued the interest of modern writers on a literary and analytical level. In the context of Indian culture, it is evident that epics and myths have a significant influence on how people behave.

Rewriting in the 21st century by writers has taken a new approach to Indian epics and its various mythical characters while challenging established norms. They have motivated readers to read the epics again. In contrast to the Western literary tradition, which views myths as unreal, Indian writers have drawn inspiration from mythology and epics to use allusions to these works to depict the actual socioeconomic conditions of our nation. In addition to the fact that mythological figures are used to depict reality, modern works that retell mythical character stories also depend on the storytelling traditions of antiquity.

In ancient India, women occupied a very important position, in fact superior to men. It is a culture whose only words for strength and power are feminine -

“Shakti” means “power” and “strength.” All male power comes from the feminine. There is multiple literary evidence that suggests the kings and towns were destroyed because the rulers troubled a single woman.

Every society has always placed the greatest importance on religion. There are multiple belief systems in the world, some of which are very new and others of which are quite old. However, all religions share the fact that women play a significant role in society. In traditional Hindu culture, women are held in the highest regard - far more respected in truth than in the West.

Mythological retellings in the 21st century serve to reinterpret timeless stories, making them relevant to contemporary audiences. These retellings often explore universal themes, provide cultural continuity, and offer fresh perspectives on human experiences, fostering a deeper understanding of our shared heritage. Feminist mythological retellings are crucial for challenging traditional narratives that often marginalize or misrepresent women. By reinterpreting myths, these retellings provide a platform to explore diverse perspectives, empower female characters, and promote gender equality in storytelling, reflecting the evolving values of society.

1.2 IMPORTANCE AND REASONS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

Myth is a folklore genre consisting of narratives that play a fundamental role in a society, such as foundational tales or origin myths. The mythical stories we were exposed to as children often featured powerful male protagonists who drew Hindu religious stories. But sadly, there are very few strong female characters that we can recognise. Women were either shown as "ideal" or "negative" figures. They were either wives, mothers, or vampires.

It is clear that in any religion, the male gaze has a powerful influence. Hinduism does not differ in this regard. Indian literature has many myths and stories. Two great Hindu epics were written by men. When Valmiki wrote Ramayana, Ved Vyas recited Mahabharata. Like utmost women's stories told by men, it reflects the fantasies and prospects of a patriarchal world rather than reality. The women are oftentimes reduced to pawns used by men to attack each other, as observed in the case of Sita and Draupadi. The mythical tales are passed down from one generation to another verbally and in writing.

Today women are claiming their space eradicating generational conditioning. They are raising their voices to demand equity. Also, since these mythological stories are being re telecasted, it is important to have a new point of view. These stories are occasionally written down and preserved by writers. Contemporary Indian writers who write in English depict legendary historical figures in relevance to contemporary issues. This includes a range of authors from Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Amish Tripathi, along with Kavita Kane.

This study aims to give voice to forgotten female protagonists of Ramayana namely Urmila and Surpankha who were unheard and submissive female mythological characters. Along with this it will emphasize on the importance of mythological retellings in literature. This study will mainly focus on the exploitation, struggle, injustice, faced by the females under the patriarchal society. Also, along with these issues this study will appreciate Kavita Kane for bringing characters like Urmila and Surpankha to limelight and social injustice faced by them. Studying Kavita Kane's Lanka's Princess and Sita's Sister through the feminist lens will be the primary aim of this paper.

Kavita Kane is an Indian author who was born on August 5, 1966. Her work in mythology fiction is well widely known. Her whole body of work is based on Indian mythology. Her book titled *Karna's Wife, The Outcast's Queen*, is the most popular one. So far, she has authored All seven books—*Karna's Wife* (2013), *Sita's Sister* (2014), *Menaka's Choice* (2015), *Lanka's Princess* (2016), *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* (2017), *Ahalya's Awakening* (2019), and *Sarasvati's Gift* all these books are based on lesser-known women in Indian mythology.

Author Kavita Kane is a revolutionary force in Indian literature, particularly because she introduced feminism to mythology, a field that sorely needed it. Kane's feminine characters provide comfort to a community that has been hurt by patriarchal traditions. By removing oneself from patriarchal concerns and gender stereotypes, Kane's female characters puncture the idolized ideas of women.

Given that she admits that writing is the only ability she possesses, it is not surprising that her literary career started as a journalist after earning dual postgraduate degrees in English literature and mass communication from the University of Pune. She has spent the last two decades working for Magna Publishing, DNA, the Times of India, and as an associate editor.

Readers may readily see from Kane's words that patriarchy has affected even mythology. According to her, misogyny and chauvinism made us all shortsighted and prevented us from seeing these women for their immense power and conviction, therefore if women have not been depicted in a true light, it is because of these factors.

1.3 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Examining the writings of Kavita Kane will provide an insightful understanding of her art. Themes of gender, women's autonomy, and identity in her works will all be examined in this research. Her depiction of female characters and their difficulties will be examined in order to shed light on feminist writing. It will look at how Kane either subverts or upholds patriarchal and society standards. Furthermore, a thorough examination of her storytelling style and the historical or mythical settings can help us better comprehend the feminist ideas she writes about.

Furthermore, by examining how female characters like Urmila and Surpanakha assert their agency in these texts, this research will be important in understanding the dynamics of sisterhood and other female relationships in the stories and examining how these relationships relate to the feminist themes. In addition, this research will examine their decisions and behaviours in light of conventional society norms. It will also look at how these books either contradict or uphold gender norms and expectations that were present in both the ancient myths and modern culture.

Thirdly, using a feminist perspective, this research will dissect and analyse a few mythical writings by Kavita Kane and look at how they have influenced modern fiction. It will look at how contemporary literature adapts, reimagines, or subverts classic mythology.

Lastly Studying these texts through a feminist lens can provide a rich and nuanced understanding of how they contribute to discussions of gender, agency, and empowerment in literature. it will explore the ethical and moral questions raised by mythological fiction. It will also explore the influence and relevance of

mythological women in modern society. It will also broaden the understanding of How do these stories address and comment on current issues and concerns of women within Kane's texts.

Though studying Kavita's Kane's text through feminist lens will broaden our understanding of mythological fiction and representation of women will give us new perspectives there are some limitations of this study.

Firstly, interpretations of feminist themes can vary, and what might be seen as empowering by one reader may not resonate the same way with another. It's essential to acknowledge diverse perspectives and interpretations.

These novels are retellings of well-known mythological stories. While they offer new perspectives, they are still bound by the source material, which may limit the extent to which feminist themes can be explored.

Adapting ancient myths into modern feminist narratives can be challenging. It's important to navigate cultural and historical sensitivities with care, as these stories are deeply ingrained in cultural traditions. The reception of these novels can vary widely. Some readers may appreciate the feminist angle, while others may prefer more traditional retellings.

In the case of *Sita's Sister*, challenging traditional gender roles while maintaining the integrity of the source material can be a delicate task. Reimagining myths from the Indian epic like Ramayana requires a deep understanding of the cultural and religious significance of these stories. Any misinterpretation or insensitivity can be offensive to some readers, especially when dealing with myths that have been passed down for centuries.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Why is mythology relevant in literature?
2. How do female mythological characters help to address gender imbalance in storytelling?
3. What are the various female issues taken up by the author?
4. Does mythological retelling help in giving voice to female characters?

1.5. RELEVANCE AND NECESSITY OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

1.5.1 NECESSITY IN THE FIELD OF LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE

Studying mythological retellings by Kavita Kane in literature is significant because she offers a unique perspective by reimagining ancient myths from the female characters' viewpoints. Her works delve into the lesser-explored narratives of female figures from mythology, shedding light on their experiences, emotions, and struggles, thereby enriching our understanding of these characters and their relevance in contemporary society. This helps in exploring gender dynamics, societal roles, and the relevance of these myths in today's world.

Studying *Sita's Sister* in languages and literature is valuable as it presents a reimagining of the Ramayana epic from a different viewpoint, focusing on Urmila, Sita's sister. Kavita Kane's portrayal of Urmila allows for an exploration of themes such as femininity, sacrifice, and individual agency, shedding light on the often overlooked or sidelined characters in traditional mythological narratives. This

perspective enriches discussions on gender roles, agency, and the cultural significance of these tales within contemporary contexts.

Studying *Lanka's Princess* contributes to the realm of languages and literature by providing a unique perspective on the Ramayana from a lesser-known character's viewpoint i.e. Surpanakha, Ravana's sister. Kavita Kane's retelling offers insights into the complexities of this character, challenging traditional portrayals and delving into themes of identity and societal perceptions. This exploration will enrich discussions on gender and power dynamics in ancient epics, fostering a deeper understanding of these narratives within contemporary contexts.

1.5.2 RELEVANCE OF RESEARCH TO SOCIETY

Research on mythological retelling is relevant in society as it preserves cultural heritage, offers insights into ancient beliefs and traditions, and helps us understand the human experience across different cultures. It enables reinterpretation of old tales in contemporary contexts, fostering creativity, and often serves as a source of entertainment while providing valuable lessons and insights into human nature, moral values, and societal norms.

Research on Kavita Kane's novels holds relevance in society for multiple reasons. It offers insights into literary analysis, cultural context, and storytelling techniques. It also sheds light on the portrayal of female characters, mythology, and historical events, contributing to the understanding of Indian literature, women's roles in society, and the impact of mythology on contemporary storytelling.

1.6 OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSED

1. To trace the relevance of myth in literature.

2. To trace the evolution of feminist retellings of mythology
3. To trace the feminist ideas, present in Kavita Kane's select text
4. To study the injustice done to women as reflected in the selected texts.
5. To compare the traditional depiction and Kane's depiction of mythical female characters.
6. To critically evaluate Kane's retelling of mythical fiction from the feminist perspective.
7. To appreciate Kavita Kane for introducing feminism to Indian mythology.
8. To appraise Kavita Kane's influence on contemporary feminist.

1.7 LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers have made great progress so far in examining Kavita Kane's novels from the feminist perspective. Kane through her novels have highlighted the exploitation and suffering of the female mythological characters.

In a research paper titled 'A Feminist Study of Kavita Kane's Lanka's Princess' by Prerona Bora and Dr. Jayanta Madhab Tamuly studies how Kavita Kane in her Lanka's Princess brought out some new dimensions to analyze the character of Surpanakha. Here in this research article, she adopted a feminist perspective, and attempted to explore the life of Surpanakha to examine whether she was the vamp or the victim of the patriarchal system.

Another research work titled as 'Deconstructing The Myth: Study Of New Female Images In Selected Works Of Pratibha Ray, Amish Tripathi And Kavita Kane' by Vishnupurikar Manisha Anandrao school of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, S.R.T.M. University, Nanded, discusses the women characters

from the selected novels and mythological connotations; and their spirit of retaliation to preserve their self-dignity.

One of the research projects by Meenakshi and Nagendra Kumar, 'A Deviant or a Victim of Pervasive Stigmatization: Wicked Women in Kavita Kané's Lanka's Princess' scrutinizes the traditional myth like Ramayana and argues in their paper how cultural ideology plays important role in construction of gender performance. This paper mainly focuses on mythical figure of Surpankha whose character embodies masculine attributes and vilified qualities that contradict the archetypal image of women in India, as prescribed by Hindu scriptures. Along with this it deconstructs the male-dominated structure of deviance and constructs a new understanding of the Ramayana.

VIDYA SHETTY, RESEARCH SCHOLAR (PH.D) published a paper UNDERSTANDING THE MALE-FEMALE DIVIDE IN THE WORLD OF ASURAS AS SHOWN IN KANE'S LANKA'S PRINCESS'. This paper is an attempt to study the life of the otherwise imagined ugly, untamed, brazen Surpanakha with a feminist perspective while studying the struggles of Surpanakha in the Asura world, the causes for her anger and sorrow and of how she operates as a woman from a relatively powerless position in comparison with Sita and Mandodari.

Research paper with the title 'A Study of Voiceless Women Characters in the Novels of Kavita Kane' is authored by Tarun Preet Kaur, A Research Scholar, School of Humanities & Social Science, GD. Goenka University, Gurgaon, Haryana and co-authored by Dr. Parul Mishra focuses on analysing how the author uses myth to retell the same story from a feminist perspective, how these versions

of ancient texts reinterpret the mythical past, and how her texts display a range of opposing attitudes toward the selected women characters and incidents in the Indian Myths.

Kane's Urmila: A Relevant Feminist Myth Creation. Poonam Sharma, Nitin Bhatnagar Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry 12 (7), 2021. Kavita Kane in her novel *Sita's Sister* has revisited the Ramayana from the daring and unwavering Urmila's (Laxmana's wife) perspective—a marginalized character who has never received the responsiveness she is worthy of. Kane has given voice to the muted character of Urmila. The present paper studies the contemporary relevance of *Sita's Sister* from feminist revisionist myth-making point of view.

GIVING VOICE TO URMILA: 'A STUDY OF KAVITA KANE'S NOVEL, *SITA'S SISTER* ' by Tarun Preet Kaur Research Scholar, School of Humanities and social sciences, GD, Goenka University, Gurgaon, Haryana. His article compares Sita and Urmila and shows how the patriarchy rejects characters like Urmila who do not follow in its rules. The rewrite gives voice to the unheard and marginalized Urmila and presents her in a completely different perspective.

Urmila of Kavita Kane's *Sita's Sister*: A Paradigm of a Contemporary Indian Women, is a study by Poonam Sharma and Nitin Bhatnagar published in *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Business and Government* Vol 27 (1), 2021. In this study researchers appreciated Kavita Kane, for her novel *Sita's Sister*, where Kane has lifted Urmila of the traditional versions of the Ramayana, from the periphery and placed her on the centre stage of the fabric. She has reiterated the myth from a daring and unwavering Urmila's perspective—a standpoint that is not dissimilar to that of the modern Indian woman. The present paper explores this

particular stand of Kane's Urmila and studies her proximity from this contemporary angle.

In A PLETHORA OF THOUGHTS: A Compilation of Research Papers, Edited by Dr. D. Vijaya Lakshmi, features a paper published by Mrs. M. Sarada Devi and Mrs. Suvarna Suni Dasari, titled as 'Urmila: An Unsung Myth of an Outstanding Woman in Kavita Kane's Sita's Sister'. This research paper sheds light on how women are neglected and overlooked in the famous epic the Ramayana. Even how Urmila's contribution in the sequences of action and establishing her own character is also made low and mistreated at many corners. The present study is made keeping in mind the post-colonial feministic approach towards examining the rewritten myths of the ancient scripts.

ASSERTION Or TRANSGRESSION : A Critical Study Of Surpankha as an Unwelcomed Girl Child in Kavita Kane's Lanka's Princess was done by Nancy Sharma and Smita Jha. This study suggest that Lanka's Princess strives to liberate her from the stereotypical image of a disfigured monster by demonstrating her as a woman who survived hatred, loss and rejection. In this paper researchers did indepth study and challenged the universally accepted patriarchal discourse concerning the representation of women in Indian mythology.

All the above research works speak about the struggle of female characters for self-identity and dignity, their quest against the male dominated society and challenges faced by women in the patriarchal set up. Also, it talks about the relevance of mythological retellings in the contemporary period. So, the research gap that has been identified is that not much research has been done on marital aspects of women's life.

1.8 HYPOTHESIS

Kavita Kane's depiction of mythological female characters brings out current feminist issues and presents traditionally deviating perspectives of mythology which are relevant to literature.

1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR PROPOSED RESEARCH

For better understanding of the study and detailed analysis textual analysis of Kavita Kane's *Lanka's Princess* and *Sita's Sister* will be done thoroughly.

This dissertation deals with the unheard female characters from one of the most famous Hindu epic Ramayana. Therefore, theory from the feminist school of literature will be applied.

Secondly a survey will be conducted to perceive reader's reception about mythological retellings. This survey will help in finding the relevance of such genre in literature and its influence on contemporary reading.

Other theories will be applied, if necessary, in order to receive a unique perspective. These methods will help in doing detailed study of the research topic.

1.10 RESEARCH DESIGN

This dissertation titled *Forgotten Protagonists: A Feminist examination of Kavita Kane's Lanka's Princess and Sita's Sister* is divided into following chapters:

Chapter I – Unveiling forgotten Protagonists.

- This chapter will set stage for overlooked mythological characters and will outline the significance of feminist literary analysis in exploring overlooked characters in mythology.

- Secondly it will introduce Kavita Kane as a contemporary author reimagining these forgotten protagonists and will also shed light on her works and their reception.

Chapter II- Deconstructing the Demoness: Revival of Surpanakha

- This chapter will examine Surpanakha's character arc in Lanka's Princess and her reimagining as a protagonist.
- It will analyze the feminist implications of Kane's portrayal of Surpanakha and her narratives.

Chapter III- Unveiling Sita's Sister: Urmila's journey

- Analysing the character of Urmila in Sita's Sister as a symbol of resilience and agency.
- It will discuss themes of agency, identity, and empowerment.
- It will examine how Kane's portrayal challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

Chapter IV-Subverting patriarchal stereotypes: Female empowerment

- This chapter will discuss how Kane subverts patriarchal narratives by centering and empowering female characters.
- It will also explore portrayal of female characters beyond Surpanakha and Urmila.
- Discuss the diversity of female experiences and perspectives depicted in Kane's narratives.

Chapter V- Reimagining Mythical Narratives through feminist lens

- This will offer a conclusion to this research.
- It will focus on collection of data through a survey and analyze the insights.

- Will also summarize key findings and insights from the analysis of forgotten protagonists in Kane's texts.
- It will also reflect on the broader implications of feminist literary theory in reshaping mythological narratives.

All these chapters will help to do systematic study of the research topic and will aid in providing thorough understanding of mythological fiction and Kavita Kane's *Sita's Sister* and *Lanka's Princess* from the feminist perspective.

CHAPTER 2- DECONSTRUCTING THE DEMONESS: REVIVAL OF

SURPANAKHA

2.1 CHARACTER ARC OF SURPANAKHA IN RAMAYANA

In the original version of Valmiki Ramayana, Surpanakha was the sister of demon king Ravana and daughter of sage Vishrava and Rakshasi Kaikesi. She was named Surpanakha due to her winnowing fan-like fingernails. Her appearance varies in different versions of Ramayana. Valmiki claims that if there was no Kaikesi or no Surpanakha then there would have been no Ramayana. Surpanakha set a chain of events which led to the destruction of Ravana. She is considered as the evil character in Ramayana. She wasn't conventionally beautiful. She was looked upon as an object rather than a woman.

Surpanakha was named Meenakshi due to her fisheyes at birth and she was beautiful like her mother Kaikesi. As per Valmiki Ramayana Surpanakha was an ugly woman (gora mukhi), cross-eyed and pot-bellied, she had a voice that was harsh on ears, she had huge breasts and was considered wicked. Surpanakha married Dushtabuddhi (Vidyujiva) who was an asura and Ravan's rival. After marriage, he enjoyed great favour from Ravan's court. But due to his greed, Ravan kills him.

This act provokes Surpanakha to take revenge on Ravan. She knew that a person with divine powers was to kill Ravan and felt that Ram was the perfect match for this agenda. Through her designs, she pitches Ram and Ravan in the battle and eventually succeeds in the end. She approaches Ram and Lakshman and gets infatuated with Ram. But Ram tells her that he is a married man and

recommends she try on Lakshman. Even Lakshman rejects and both the brothers keep her tossing from one to another. This makes her anger worse.

Instead of refusing her, two brothers Ram and Lakshman laugh at her desperation. Surpankha feels humiliated and holds Sita responsible for it. According to her Ram rejected her because of Sita and she tried to attack Sita. Later with the fear that she would scratch Sita's face in anger, Ram orders Lakshman to chop her senses. Lakshman just follows the orders of his brother and chops Surpanakha's nose, ears and breasts disfiguring her.

This act provokes Ravan to take revenge and he abducts Sita. This incident further led to the epic battle between Ram and Ravan. Eventually Ram kills Ravan and saves Sita. Through her character, it can be seen that Surpanakha felt it difficult to survive in the world. Although she was not beautiful like Sita, she wasn't submissive either. All these events put forth a few questions such as it is a crime to express her feelings. Was Surpanakha bad or was her identity shaped by her situation? Why did Lakshman and Ram have to insult her causing her pain? Was she a victim or a fierce feminist of her time?

It is mentioned in the Bhramavaivrata Purana that after the death of Ravan and the end of the battle, Surpanakha goes to sacred lake Pushkara and prays to God Brahma to get married to Ram in her next birth. And then after years, she was born as Kubja, the hunchback woman who later becomes the wife of Krishna - the incarnation of Rama.

2.2 SURPANAKHA'S DEPICTION IN LANKA'S PRINCESS

Lanka's Princess by Kavita Kane is a retelling of the Ramayana from the perspective of Surpanakha, the sister of the demon king Ravana. The novel delves into Surpanakha's life, her desires, struggles, and the events that led to the epic battle between Rama and Ravana.

The story begins with Surpanakha reminiscing about her childhood in Lanka, where she and her siblings were raised by their mother, the powerful demoness Kaikesi and Rishi Vishravas. Surpanakha's early years are marked by her desire for acceptance and love from her family, particularly her brother Ravana, who is portrayed as ambitious and ruthless.

As Surpanakha grows older, she becomes aware of her beauty and desires. However, her attempts to win Ravana's affection are thwarted by his obsession with Sita, the wife of Prince Rama. Surpanakha finds love in Vidyujiva and marries him despite the family's opposition. Even after her marriage, she stays in Lanka with her husband. After a few years, Ravan seeks a chance and kills Vidyujiva because of his disloyalty to his sister. Surpanakha vows to avenge Ravan.

Once when she visits Ram, Lakshman, and Sita at Dandak she gets infatuated with Ram and tries on him. Looking at his loyalty towards his beautiful wife Sita she feels Sita is a problem in her way and tries to attack her. Later Rams gets enraged and orders Lakshman to maim her. Lakshman chops her nose and ears, disfiguring her.

Surpanakha later chalks out a plan to punish Ram and Lakshman. She spins actions to her advantage and asks Ravan to give her justice. Ravan's ego gets hurt by looking at Surpanakha's horrific face and he declares a war with Ram.

Surpanakha's jealousy and longing for Ravana's death drive her to manipulate events, ultimately leading to Sita's abduction and the subsequent war between Rama and Ravana. Surpanakha's craze for revenge drives her mad and leads to the destruction of the entire Asura clan.

In the end, Ram kills Ravan and saves Sita. After Ravan's death when Surpanakha gets to know that it was Lakshman who killed her son Kumar, she plans to kill Lakshman's son Angad and scratch Urmila's face so that it would remind Lakshman of his injustice done to her. But when she gets the opportunity, she does not kill him. She sees a reflection of hers, Vidyujiva and Kumar in Lakshman, Urmila and Angad and forgives Lakshman, which displays her kind humanity.

Throughout the novel, Surpanakha grapples with her conflicting emotions and her sense of identity as a demoness. She struggles to reconcile her loyalty to her family with her desires and ambitions. Surpanakha's journey is one of selfdiscovery and redemption as she comes to terms with the consequences of her actions and finds a sense of peace and acceptance.

Kane's portrayal of Surpanakha is complex and nuanced, offering readers a fresh perspective on a character traditionally depicted as a villain. Through Surpanakha's eyes, readers gain insight into the motivations and struggles of a woman caught between loyalty to her family and her desires.

Overall, Lanka's Princess is a fascinating retelling of the Ramayana that presents a distinctive viewpoint on one of its most interesting characters, for those who enjoy both mythology and historical fiction. Kane's deep character development and evocative writing make this book must-read.

2.3 CHARACTER ARC OF LANKA'S PRINCESS AS A PROTAGONIST

The perception of Surpanakha, the princess of Lanka, is always negative. She is regarded as the one who destroyed the entire Asura clan and is frequently and always viewed as evil. But no one noticed or care about the causes behind her actions. She was named Meenakshi by her father Vishravas because “her eyes were as golden and graceful as a fish's.” (Kane,5). But her mother noticed her “abnormally long nails as they almost looked like claws, curved and somewhat curling with a prominent moon-shaped crescent” (Kane,5) and chose to name her Chandranakha. But her journey from beautiful Meenakshi to monster Surpanakha was always overlooked.

Nobody gets to choose their caste or class before birth and likewise, Surpanakha also did not get this choice and was born into the Asura dynasty. She was always looked upon as a wicked character with mystical powers. But her hardships and sufferings as a woman were never remarked. To avenge her dishonour and distress she brought downfall to her dynasty.

Kane in Lanka's Princess makes it evident how Meenakshi was made to turn into Surpanakha just for her survival. Like any other girl, Surpanakha always wished for a happy and lovely family. She always wanted to be celebrated but to her sad realization, she was mostly tolerated in her own family by her mother, father, and her brothers.

In Lanka's Princess, Kavita Kane aimed to transform Surpanakha from an evil, adulterous monster into a fearless, strong woman who not only lived, but also fought back against and exacted revenge on all the injustices she had faced as a woman. Here, rather than just repeating the widely accepted narrative about

Surpanakha's character, Kane deconstructed the long-held beliefs about her identity by focusing more on the underlying reasons behind her actions.

Kane depicted the ways in which Meenakshi's early experiences with rejection and humiliation had a significant impact on her later years. It had not only made her feel resentful but also forced her to look for a different identity so that she could defend her own rights and dignity. Meenakshi believed in herself and never accepted the discrimination she was made to face. She also realized that she would have to face life's obstacles on her own as she had personally seen how everyone had rejected and criticized her.

According to conventional society the birth of a girl child was seen as burdensome and on the other hand boy was seen as a treasure trove to the family. It was a traditional belief that boys were necessary to deal with family conflicts and girls were expected to be subservient occupying the bottom rank of the social hierarchy. This is seen in Kavita Kane's *Lanka's Princess* as Kaikesi stated her dislike of the fourth kid who was a girl right from her birth. She was unhappy with the birth of her daughter, as Kane writes, her heart sank, drowning her aspirations in a flood of disappointment and tears when she heard the news that “it’s a girl!”. (Kane,01). Kaikesi wanted strong and wise sons to get back Lanka's throne from Kuber. She already had three sons Vibhishan, Kumbha and Ravan but feels disappointed with the birth of her daughter. Kaikesi remarks Meenakshi's as “This girl has cheated me of my plans.” (Kane,2) as she believed her daughter will do no good for her. And Surpanakha becomes a sole victim of her mother’s bitterness right from her childhood.

Secondly women in olden times faced discrimination based on their physical appearance, particularly their body and complexion. Kaikesi would criticize her daughter's looks instead of showering her with love. She would say, “How is this dark monkey going to bring us good fortune? No one will ever marry her!” (Kane 03). This shows how daughters were viewed as burdensome, with their marriage being a more significant concern than their personal growth and wellbeing. If a girl faces discrimination in her own house, then what expectations can one have from the society? This also sheds light on the fact that in patriarchal society physical beauty was preferred over inner beauty or intelligence. But Vishravas in this case represent the traits of modern man. For example, when Kaikesi said ‘she hardly looks beautiful or like me. In fact, she is quite ugly!’ (Kane 02) Vishravas replied to her ‘But she’s a newborn and all babies can't be as bonny as kumbha or fair as Ravan or vibhishan!’ (Kane 03).

Surpanakha right from her childhood felt inferior due to her dark skin. And Kane reflects this through several incidents throughout the novel. Surpanakha was very close to her grandmother Taraka and questions her, “Can you make me beautiful with one of your potions, Nani?” (Kane, 20). She feels saddened with herself and says, “But I am not like either of you, I am darker, like the night sky!!” (Kane, 21). Surpanakha felt like an oddity and an outcast in her family and realized that ‘She would never be a part of her family of good lookers’. (Kane,20). She often felt insecure about her looks due to set beauty standards in the society as ‘Meenakshi knew what beauty meant and what it implied. She had grown up amongst it.’ Even today it is important for a woman to look beautiful, and Kane provides solution and advice through Taraka, ‘Beauty lies in your head and heart,

you have to believe it. But for that first you have to love yourself” (Kane, 22) But Taraka her Nani made her realize that one should not be ashamed of her body and femininity. Beauty should be flaunted. This further helped Surpanakha on a great scale and then she accepted her femininity more freely and proudly.

According to the traditional gender notion women are considered weak and emotional. Society does not appreciate women who tries to be assertive. But Meenakshi rebelled and safeguarded herself whenever she felt unsafe. She did not wait for others to come to her rescue. For example, when Ravan killed Meenakshi's pet lamp Maya, she got furious and tried to harm Ravan. Meenakshi dugged her nails into the soft flesh of Ravan's neck leaving him bleeding. Meenakshi took her revenge on him by herself. When Vibhishan and Kumbhakarna tried to control the situation Ravan shouted out loud “Surpanakha that's what she is. Not Chandranakha as Mother calls her, but a witch with long, sharp claws...(Kane,8). And from hereon, sweet Meenakshi turned into the powerful Surpanakha. From this event Meenakshi thought “if this could protect me, then well, I am Surpanakha...(Kane,8) and she made use of her hard nails as her most powerful weapon to teach Ravan a lifelong lesson. Secondly when Kuber tried to kidnap her, she fiercely fought with him and saved herself from the clutches of Kuber.

Surpanakha fiercely fought for her rights and obliged to follow the traditional roles assigned to women. Many such events shaped her personality and made her emotionally distant from her own family. She always felt abandoned and an outsider in her family all the time. She often felt lonely and sad, and grief stricken amidst the crowd. Surpanakha never received the attention that her brothers received from her family. She often felt left out and alone.

A mother plays a crucial role in the daughter's life. A girl child yearns for her mother's love and always tries to copy her. But Surpanakha disliked her mother. Kaikesi always spitted venom for her daughter and taunted Surpanakha for her dark shade. She always called her ugly. Kaikesi always criticized her daughter's behaviour even if she tried to defend herself from the danger. In the novel she asks her 'Why can you not behave like a girl? Always fighting and squabbling, hitting boys and throwing stones and scratching eyes out of anyone who provokes you. Surpanakha, that's the right name for you, you monster!' (Kane, 09) instead of asking her for the cause of the fight or giving her advice Surpanakha always faced bitter consequences of her actions. But Surpanakha realized that she's the only one who can protect herself; she asserts that, "If anyone hurts me, I shall hurt them with these!!" (Kane, 09).

Surpanakha swallowed every sip of injustice done to her when she was a child but as she was growing up, she understood that to change the narrative of her story she needed to voice up for herself and fight for her rights to survive in the whole wide patriarchal world. Although Surpanakha always tried to defend herself she was always blamed for her actions. She never received a patting from her mother because of her fierce behaviour but moreover faced the consequences of her justifiable actions. She was always made to behave like a submissive girl and follow the traditional idea that women should be submissive and docile.

marriage was considered as the most crucial institution in traditional Indian society. It was decided by elders of the family with little or no participation of individuals in choosing their partner. Marriage was seen as a means to strengthen alliances, preserve lineage, and ensure economic stability, with women expected to

be submissive wives and mothers. Kane echoes this notion through Kumbha when Surpanakha tries to marry Vidyujiva who was Ravan's enemy. Kumbha says, "let's be more reasonable. Marriages are often made to consolidate power and settle feuds..." (Kane, 123). Surpanakha chose her partner despite of the family's opposition. She wore Uttariya (shoulder shawl) and antariya (garment to cover body under navel) all in red and not in contrasting colours as was the fashion. Right from choosing her partner to choosing her outfit, Surpanakha made choices by herself.

Surpanakha displayed independence in her actions and decisions, refusing to be controlled or confined by the men in her life. She did not get fooled easily by the male figures. She always understood their underlying interest behind their concern and love towards her. She was a practical thinker and not an emotional fool. When Vidyujiva planned on staying in Lanka even after their wedding she reminded Vidyujiva of his kingly duties and asked him various questions. She was eager to leave Lanka and start her life with Vidyujiva at Ashma. Surpanakha was a woman with dignity and respect. At Vidyujiva's refusal to back to his kingdom she says "I would rather live with respect than wealth or power or false status. Ravan resents you and so does my family. You are after all, a Kalkeya and I dared to marry one. I want you to be respected, not looked at with suspicion..."(Kane,134).

Vidyujiva, he wished to confiscate Ravan's kingdom and to save his throne, Ravan kills him. Because of this incident Surpanakha's marital bliss remains short lived. Surpanakha realises that her family also supported Ravana during this entire plot. By killing Vidyujiva Ravan loses his sister too. Heartbroken Surpanakha leaves Lanka with her son Sambhukumar to Dandak Forest with determined mind

to kill Ravan. She loses her son at Dandak Forest in an unexpected incident. Yet she stays firm and manipulates events to seek her revenge. Although she was grief stricken, she doesn't give up on her aim. This shows her inner strength and determination.

Ram, Lakshman, and Sita decide to spend their last year of exile at Dandak. Surpanakha got physically attracted towards Ram and Lakshman and confessed her feelings towards Ram. He immediately rejects her saying he is a married man and asks her to think about Lakshman, but he too rejects her. And two brothers burst in laughter reeling her to and fro like a toy, like a mere means of amusement. (Kane,200). With the feeling of being humiliated, Surpanakha tries to attack Sita, as she feels Ram rejected her because of Sita. After anticipating the seriousness of the moment *good natured* Ram orders, “Lakshman, take care of this unvirtuous, ruttish rakshasi and teach her a lesson she will never forget!”(Kane,201). Despite of Surpanakha's strong protest, Lakshman maims her. Was this mutilation a necessary act? Were Ram and Lakshman to be justified for their crime?

Although Surpanakha had lost her husband, her honour, but she had not lost her will. In the end when Surpanakha gets to know that it was Lakshman who had killed her son, she first tries to kill his son Angad but later sees reflection of her own miserable state in three: Lakshman, Urmila and Angad. She doesn't take revenge on Lakshman saying, ‘I didn't want you to suffer my fate. Or your child.’(Kane,293). This shows her humanity and kindness. This very incident sheds light on the fact that Surpanakha was a demoness but had a human heart, although her actions were wicked, she was just trying to avenge injustice done to her.

2.4 THEMES

2.4.1 AGENCY AND AUTONOMY

Surpanakha's character is given agency and autonomy in Lanka's Princess, challenging her traditional portrayal as a demoness. She makes her own choices and decisions even if they are unconventional and controversial. She is referred to as unpleasant and cruel in the traditional depiction. Throughout the novel Surpanakha is seen as a strong, independent woman who never failed to express her feelings and emotions. Growing up amongst the men she always faced suppression and negligence. But she rose high, fighting for her rights and subverting the conventional social norms that define woman as submissive. Her struggle to be independent is remarkable.

Women had little to almost no say in their marriages and they were largely arranged by family members. But Surpanakha chooses her groom by herself, Surpanakha undergoes a journey of self-discovery and transformation throughout the novel, evolving from a naive young woman to a more empowered and self-aware individual who embraces her identity and agency. She does not conform to patriarchal society where the family selected a groom for their daughter but rather fought with her family and selected Vidyujiva as her husband who was known as Ravan's biggest rival.

During epic times women were merely seen as objects then human beings. For example, Kuber tries to safeguard Lanka from Ravan by kidnapping Surpanakha, and he retorts that, 'Safeguarding my Lanka and my interests!' 'This girl stays with me till I get an assurance that Ravan will not attack Lanka.' (Kane,

44) But instead of being pawn in the scene Surpanakha retaliates back, which was unusual for a woman to do during that time. She demonstrates power by saving herself from the clutches of Kuber rather than waiting for someone else to come to her rescue. Although she was small and thin there was a flood of fire in her eyes that left Kuber startled.

Surpanakha's defiance against oppression, particularly from her male member, showcases her resilience and strength in the face of adversity. She always voiced the rightful things. She did swallow the sip of injustice done to her but not submissively. Surpanakha always raised questions regarding her unfair treatment for example during the time of Ramayana girls were not entitled to be educated with Vedas, shastras and Upanishads like men. Even Surpanakha was not allowed to learn them. But instead of silently accepting her fate she questioned, 'But why am I not allowed to study the Vedas like my brothers, Nani? I know I am not fast in calculations as Vibhishan or clever as Ravan...' (Kane, 24)

Iron-willed and fearless, Surpanakha never gave up and dared to fight by herself. Through her hardships, Surpanakha proved that women can become unstoppable if they strongly advocate for their own rights and are sufficiently positive about their goals and ambitions in life.

Surpanakha always yearned for a friend with whom she could have endless chat but being Ravan's sister, no one dared to speak to her which ended up Surpanakha being left alone in her wing. Surpanakha appreciated productive talks she did not like mingling at formal occasions either. Their conversations stifled her. 'The words and topics were so ordinary, so boring that moved Meenakshi either to irritation or indignation.' (Kane, 80). Instead of participating in meaningless talks

she could do something worthwhile which demonstrates her agency throughout the narrative, making her own choices and driving her own story rather than being merely a pawn in others' schemes.

Once as a child Meenakshi fought with her neighbour Som to save Vibhishan for which instead of being appreciated she was snapped by Kaikesi saying, 'Vibhishan is a boy, and he's older to you. He doesn't need your protection!' (Kane, 05). She then did not bother to nurse Meenakshi even though she was bruised and was bleeding but checked for bruises on her son's arms and legs. Kaikesi yelled at Vibhishan 'You wimp, can't you fight for yourself? You allow your younger sister to come to your help each time? Where was Ravan?' (Kane, 05) this laments that in patriarchal society people thought that only men could protect themselves and their people. Getting saved by a female was looked down upon and was suggested as a scheme for men. But right from her childhood Surpanakha challenges traditional gender roles by being assertive and refusing to conform to the passive, submissive archetype typically assigned to women in her society and fights for rights.

Women were subjected to various social, political, and cultural disadvantages. In male dominated societies women are not allowed to live their life as they wish. They were not given motivation to dream big for themselves. Their importance was acknowledged with the amount of service they render to their family and not through the upliftment of themselves or their individuality. In Lanka's Princess Kavita Kane portrays some strong female characters along with Surpanakha who break long rotten rules and assert their individuality.

2.4.2 THEME OF INJUSTICE

Throughout the novel Kane critiques patriarchal norms and values that perpetuate gender inequality and oppression. She exposes double standards and injustice faced by women in Indian society. Including forced marriages, gender-based violence and societal expectations of female chastity and obedience.

Through several examples from the novel, we get to know that how women were exploited under the patriarchal set up. Once flying in his Pushpak Viman in around smooth greenery Ravan spotted a girl, near tiny ashram. She was worshipping the Tulsi plant. Ravan was mesmerized at the site of the girl and immediately fell in love with her. Ravan approached the girl, and she politely welcomed him to her little hut finishing her prayers. After little conversation Ravan got to know that she was Vedavati the daughter of king Kushadwaj. And immediately proposed the girl for a marriage but Vedavati was committed to Vishnu. She was doing her penance so that she could marry Vishnu one day and hence rejected Ravan's proposal. Instead of leaving the place, Ravan tried hard to woo the girl but every time she rejected him. When Ravan could not get her with his charm, he grabbed her by her hair and pulled her hair and forced himself on her. Vedavati fled from him and jumped into the yagna fire. Instead of staying with Ravan she decided to end her life because she was tainted by Ravan's touch. This depicts the helpless condition of marginalised women during the time of epic. After learning the truth Instead of punishing Ravan for this hilarious crime Kaikesi brushed the topic easily.

Secondly Ravan raped Rambha (daughter in law of Kuber) in order to humiliate Kuber and seek revenge. He molested a girl to avenge Kuber. This shows that women were not seen as humans but more like objects who had no control over their choices and decisions. Rambha was wronged due to the rivalry between two men. Ravan says, “these are political moves. After my win, Rambha would have been offered to me as a token of truce.” (Kane,121). This incident illustrates how women had to face humiliation and injustice during the epic time. Learning the truth Surpanakha calls her brother coward. Which again contributes to her feminist traits where she raises her voice for the fallen, instead of supporting her brother she criticises his action.

Ravan not only wronged Rambha but other females like his own sister and wife. Ravan kills Viduyjiva to safeguard his throne making his sister a widow. “As they say, the wife is the last to know,” (Kane,143). Mandodari was completely unaware about Ravan's illicit behaviour. Mandodari in chapter *infidelity* highlights all the sacrifices and series of responsibilities a woman takes charge throughout her life. She expresses her sadness as she fails to stop Ravan from attending Sita's swayamvar. It shows that man could fulfil all their wishes and desires, but women same could not do the same. They were the only silent spectators.

Throughout the novel most injustice is faced by Surpanakha may it be as daughter, sister, as a wife and more as a woman. Surpanakha was like a free, liberal spirit. She confidently confessed her sexual desires throughout the novel. She was called unvirtuous by Ram as she expressed her feelings to him. Ram and Lakshman could have left her with warning or should have rejected her proposal directly. Instead, Ram tells her to try on Lakshman saying, ‘But my brother here is free man-

he is single and available unlike me.’(Kane,199). Why Ram had to say this? He knew Lakshman was a married man and his wife Urmila was waiting for him at Ayodhya. Furthermore, Ram orders Lakshman to maim Surpanakha as he suspects her of harming Sita. Ram saved his wife but caused injustice to another woman.

Through Surpanakha, Kane questions what crime she had committed to receive such harsh punishment. ‘Maim her, what weird barbarity was this and for what? she thought panicking. For displaying desire for these two handsome men? How could someone so beautiful be so ugly and cruel? What were they furious about - me attacking Sita or me assaulting their chastity, their moral righteousness? Was it their apprehension for my uninhibited behaviour, assuming it to be an overt vulgarity, an open display of unleashed carnal anarchy? Was that they had laughed at me, ridiculing me in their contempt and amazement, their arrogant condescendence condemning me for my feminine profanities? (Kane, 202).

Along with Surpanakha, Sita also faces injustice. Instead of directly declaring war against Ram, Ravan kidnaps her to challenge him. Throughout the novel one can see that men indirectly used women as their armour yet pretended as the most strong and fierce species. Later Sita is made to give agnipariksha to prove her fidelity and innocence, yet Ram leaves her to live a life of a vagabond in some forest. Although Sita sacrificed everything to fulfil her duty as a wife, Ram abandons her because of so called society and their accusations.

Overall, Surpanakha's portrayal in Lanka's Princess epitomizes feminist themes of empowerment, agency, and defiance, offering readers a compelling and nuanced perspective on a character traditionally relegated to the margins of the narrative. Through Surpanakha's experiences and interactions, the novel offers a

critique of patriarchal structures that limit women's agency and autonomy, prompting readers to question and challenge these systems. The novel delves into Surpanakha's emotional landscape, exploring her desires, frustrations, and insecurities, humanizing her character, and highlighting the complexity of women's experiences.

CHAPTER 3- UNVEILING SITA'S SISTER - URMILA'S JOURNEY

3.1 INTRODUCTION TO URMILA'S CHARACTER IN RAMAYANA

Ramayana is one of the two great Indian epics and is deeply rooted in Indian tradition. It is known for the epic battle between Ram and Ravan. It is not only about the victory of good over evil. But it also sheds light on love, obedience, sacrifice, brotherhood, and sisterhood. However, there are few female characters who have been unnoticed and have not received the proper attention they deserved. Kavita Kane in *Sita's Sister* reimagines Ramayana and presents Urmila as a strong, intelligent, and powerful female character.

In Valmiki's Ramayana Urmila never appears on the centre stage. She is spared very few verses in the epic. Urmila is a rarely known character from Ramayana. As mentioned in the traditional depiction she was a daughter of King Janakraj (king of Mithila) she was a younger sister to Sita and wife of Lakshmana. Though Sita was the elder daughter of King Janakraj, she was actually adopted, and Urmila was his biological daughter. In the Swayamvar Sabha Ram wins Sita by lifting the Haradhanu. When the marriage was settled between Ram and Sita, King Dashrath asked Urmila's hand in marriage for his son Lakshmana. King gladly decides to marry Urmila with Lakshman. In this way two sisters Urmila and Sita turn out to be sister-in-law to each other.

Lakshman and Urmila live their married life happily for a while but get separated when Lakshman decides to go accompany Ram for his fourteen years of

exile. Knowing the situation Urmila tries to persuade Lakshman to take her with him but remains unlucky as Lakshman strictly refuses her request and suggests her to look after his ageing parents and other family members. Lakshman further tells her that he would remain busy in serving Ram and Sita and would have no time to spare for Urmila. He firmly tells her that he would fulfil his dharma as a brother. This leaves Urmila with no choice rather than to agree to the condition and stay behind (Ayodhya Kandha).

On the first day of the exile Lakshman builds a beautiful hut for Ram and Sita. During night as Ram and Sita sleeps in the hut Lakshman guards them by standing outside. One bright female figure appears in front of him when he naturally feels sleepy after some time, she introduces herself as Nidradevi, the goddess of sleep. Lakshman immediately asks goddess for exemption of sleep for fourteen years as he would have to protect Sita and Ram. Goddess replies that remaining sleepless for fourteen years was against the law of nature but getting much impressed with Lakshman's devotion to Rama and Sita, she grants him prayer with one condition. This one condition further complicates the actions. According to the law of nature someone had to sleep for fourteen years on the behalf of Lakshman. He further requests Nidradevi to approach his wife, Urmila as he believed that she would not reject the proposal.

As Lakshman believed Urmila gladly accepts to sleep for fourteen years. She sacrifices fourteen years of her life for the love she bore for Lakshman. Her sacrifice allows Lakshman to do his duty and proves as boon too. Because of Urmila Lakshman could defeat sleep and because of which he could kill Meghnath (Son of Ravana). Meghnath was granted a boon that he could be killed by someone

who has defeated sleep and Urmila played a major role in this case. Although Urmila's role in Ramayana was minor but was extremely important. Although she is the least discussed character from Ramayana, her sacrifice cannot be ignored. Her role in Ramayana is equally important as the rest of the characters. Her sacrifice is made to be sound passive in the traditional depiction of Ramayana.

3.2. KANE'S DEPICTION OF URMILA IN SITA'S SISTER

'O Urmila, will the world ever know of your inner suffering, your divine sacrifice?' (Kane, 158). The entire novel *Sita's Sister* can be analysed to answer the above question. Kavita Kane centres the character of Urmila to let people know about her sacrifice not only as a wife of Lakshman but also as a woman. We often see people talk about Ram and Sita, but we hardly hear anyone talking about Urmila and Lakshman. Their love and sacrifice is often underrated and need to be known by everyone.

Kane breaks the traditional version and presents Urmila as a scholar who does not allow her sacrifice to be sound passive. She actively asserts her autonomy and takes charge of her life. Through the character of Urmila, Kane puts emphasis on the male dominated society and how the entire system neglected women in major discussion including her marriage. In the novel Urmila accepts Lakshman's request to stay back but not with absolute meekness. In *Sita's Sister*, Urmila doesn't take a backseat and allow others to decide her fate but instead she herself rides a journey of her life by not absolutely breaking all the rules but moreover bending them.

Urmila questions the dharma of a husband and a son during the discussion on Dharma. Although people identify Ram, Lakshman and Sita with an exile, Urmila faced equal hardships and sufferings even being in the palace of Ayodhya. Through the character of Sita, Kane remarks on Urmila's exile at palace of Ayodhya. While bidding farewell to Urmila, Sita says, 'I bow to you sister, for your vanvaas, your exile here in the palace shall be harder than mine in the forest. Give me some strength and I know I shall succeed too.' (Kane, 153)

Kane has depicted women's power and struggle in a male dominated society first as a daughter, then as a wife, daughter in law, and as a mother. Through Sita's Sister Kane has not only attacked patriarchy but has immensely succeeded in advocating the fact that, if given a chance women can excel in all spheres of life may it be social, political, or economic. They are equally capable like that of men. In Sita's Sister Kane gives several pieces of evidence that shows women's autonomy, agency, sisterhood, and empowerment through female characters. Kane breaks the age-old stereotypes by empowering women, giving them voice and independence to take charge of their life.

3.3. URMILA AS A PROTAGONIST IN *SITA'S SISTER*

Kavita Kane gives voice to Urmila representing her as a dominant feminist character. She gives her traits of a modern Indian woman. She has represented Urmila as a bold character who fiercely stands against the injustice done to her and questions the patriarchal dominance.

Urmila in Kavita Kane's *Sita's Sister* is immensely smart and like a modern woman has a mind of her own. She is intelligent, kind and loving. She was a

daughter of King Janak and queen Sunaina of Ayodhya who himself was a Rajrishi well versed in Vedas and shastras. Urmila along with her sisters Sita, Mandavi, and Shrutkirti were brought up by King Janak. 'They were well versed in the Vedas and Upanishads, politics, music, art and literature.' Although it was unlikely for women during the time of Ramayana to join scholarly conferences with men, they had accompanied their father to all the conferences and religious seminars across the country, experiencing a world no princess had been allowed to visit. (Kane,9). Urmila was hungry for knowledge. Urmila yearned for more; she wanted to see more places, places she had heard about through the growing years...Marriage did not hold much interest for Urmila but it was a social discipline she would have to conform to. She would rather seek knowledge instead of a suitor. (Kane,9). Women were not supposed to participate in the intellectual engagement but as can be seen in the novel women in Kane's text breaks this rule skilfully and effectively.

In the novel Urmila exhibits her assertiveness and femininity. Her courage and fearlessness is depicted throughout the novel. She fiercely protects her sisters, Lakshman, and people she loves. During the time of Ramayana women were not supposed to speak especially when men were around. But Urmila was bold and outspoken enough to speak her thoughts and feelings. For example, when during Sita's swayamvar Ravan fails to lift the Rudra bow he roars in anger and insults king Janak and Sita. He wishes to marry Urmila to Salvage his broken pride. On hearing Ravan's malicious words instead of just being a meek listener 'she looked at him, her eyes sparkling with unsuppressed Fury and loathing' (kane,32).

Soon after this, crowd goes insane asking for Urmila's hand in marriage and Urmila quickly gets the intensity of the situation and understands that she needs to

protect herself from the antagonistic suitors. Instead of relying on others to help her, she knew she would have to battle it alone-for herself and her sisters. (Kane,34) This also proves as a lesson for contemporary women that they should protect themselves rather than waiting for someone else to come to her rescue.

Secondly, she saves Lakshman from sage Parshuram's wrath. After Lakshman's remark of Shiv Dhanush being broken by Ram, sage Parshuram gets infuriated and does not hesitate to kill Lakshman. At this time Urmila gathers courage and goes to rishi and tries to calm his anger and speaks words of praise. She bows before him and seeks his blessings. Although she harboured love for Lakshman it was unusual for a woman to save man. Same Urmila tries to attack Lakshman for killing Sita as she fails to recognise demon in the guise of Sita. She does a male job of protecting their loved ones. This incident sheds light on her courageous and fearless nature.

‘Urmila was not merely Sita's shadow, but Urmila had always been the veritable older sister all through their growing years-strong fiercely protective like a tigress shielding her from everything, guiding her helping her consoling her.’ (Kane,24). She and Lakshman were both protective in their roles. Urmila bravely fought her inner conflicts and insecurities. When Lakshman refuses to marry Urmila as he won't be able to keep her happy and give her marital bliss that she deserves. He tells her that if she marries him, she'll never be able to be queen or moreover his love for Ram would deviate his responsibilities as a husband. When Lakshman discloses the hardships that would follow their wedding instead of breaking off the marriage Urmila boldly expresses her decision to marry him. She chooses to live with her love and suffer the consequences rather than just survive

without him. This reflects on her feminist traits because although she was aware of the consequences, yet she was unafraid to face them.

Urmila is a strong fighter who does not bother about the outcome of her actions. She questions and argues against the injustice. Her outburst is highlighted when she hears the news that Kaikeyi, one of the three queens of King Dashrath plans to remarry Ram as she doesn't approve of Sita as his wife. It flares Urmila with temper, and she asks Sita to voice her grievances. Urmila furiously states, "How dare they do this to you?" and further adds that "You shall not take it silently anymore, Sita! The barbs were mean enough and should have been stopped. They have the audacity to think of remarriage dismissing you as if you are some trophy to be replaced! I won't have it Sita..." (Kane,100). Furthermore, Urmila strongly states that "they haven't realized yet that we are the daughters of Janak and Sunaina who have been taught to uphold their pride and be courageous" (Kane,100). Urmila vehemently questions the patriarchal dominance and power. In the contemporary world like king Janak every parent should teach their child to uphold their pride and dignity. They should be taught to fight for their rights.

It is said that the male half is incomplete without his female half. While on exile Ram is accompanied by his wife Sita but Lakshman leaves Urmila behind without even asking for her opinion. This decision leaves Urmila dejected and numb as, 'he was leaving her to go with his brother for fourteen years. (Kane,140). Lakshman and Sita were her two loved ones and both of them were leaving her. However, Urmila was a girl with a fierce nature. When Lakshman comes to bid her farewell, she blames her husband with great courage for not taking her with him unlike his brother Ram. She spews bitter words at Lakshman, 'I knew you would

refuse me again...' that is what your love is -hurtful and rejectful you don't love at all Lakshman, you cannot love! (Kane,146). First, she pleads to him to take her but later she realizes that her pleas were falling on deaf ears.

Though she herself was tortured with the grief of separation she makes it lighter for her husband by saying pointing at her shimmering soft silks and jem, 'I am a princess born in leisure and luxury would you expect me to spurn this to chase you in your misguided wild adventure with your brother eating berries and walking barefoot and cooking meals for the two of you?'(Kane,147). Though uttering these bitter words pierces her heart she doesn't want Lakshman to feel guilty about his actions, so she tries to establish mental balance by doing so. This is revealed when Kane echoes Urmila's words, 'you can hate me for all I just said I hope I have made it easier for you now, she thought bleakly, made it easier for us, to hate rather than to love each other for the next fourteen years is separation. (Kane, 148) this reflects that Urmila was a headstrong woman.

Patriarchal society has fixed rules for women and these rules are designed by men. These rules expect women to pay attention to husband and his family. Lakshman is also no exception as he expects Urmila to stay back and nurse his parent's health and look after them. Urmila also becomes victim of these commitments. Although it becomes difficult for Urmila to adapt to the patriarchal environment of Ayodhya, she fulfils her dharma as a housewife, daughter in law and a sister. She respects everyone, yet she never thinks twice before challenging the authority when she witnesses wrongdoing against her or others in the palace.

It is not appropriate for a bride or gullible daughter-in-law to speak out against the family's elders. A woman experiences the wrath of the entire family on

such instances. But Urmila begins questioning Kaikeyi for sending Ram, Sita, and Lakshman in fourteen years in exile. She mocks the old queen for her cruel behaviour. She nevertheless manages challenging circumstances with ease. This shows traits of contemporary Indian women in Urmila who would question and challenge the wrongdoing.

Urmila was a rational and understanding being. She could calmly handle any situation. When Sunaina her mother cries over the sufferings of her daughter Urmila calms her down saying, 'Father and you taught us, Ma, that our dharma is to support our husbands- never blindly, but to be with them when they are right and to correct them when they are wrong...(Kane,184). Sunaina addresses Urmila as, tough, kind, competent and smart - the four qualities needed to survive in this world. And exactly as Sunaina mentions with all her qualities mentioned above Urmila takes charge of her life asserting her autonomy and showcasing empowerment. Not only for Urmila but these qualities must be retained by females in today's society where we might need these qualities to change any situation in our favor.

Moreover, praising Urmila's qualities Sunaina says, 'And what I also see is my little girl grown into this fine woman who stands elegantly brave ever in her despair and desolation, who sees not the darkness but the light ahead who appreciates the now for the never'. (Kane, 187). This is true of Urmila's character as rather than crying over her distorted and tortured life she chooses to live her life in a new light.

Although Urmila was devastated when Sita and Lakshman left her behind, she silently accepts the truth of her life and takes care of the royal family. When

Ram, Lakshman and Sita were in exile, at the same time Bharat and Shatrughan were in Kekeya. After the death of king Dashrath there was a terror of war in Ayodhya. There was nobody to rule the kingdom and along with it there was fear of anarchy. When Vasishtha told his worry to the family, Urmila smoothly handled the situation with her might. Even though she was criticized by queen Kaikeyi for being young and interfering in court affairs as she believed that it was the duty of ministers and royal priests. But Kaikeyi was cut short by the guru. Urmila being a learned daughter of king Janak, courtesans believed in her administrative ability and willingness 'O daughter of wise Rajrishi Janak, please look into the matters of the royal court for we do not want to be accused of power play or otherwise. (Kane, 181). This indicates her administrative ability. Urmila was conscious about her social duty. Urmila could effortlessly drive her household and formal duties because she used to discuss the courtly matters of Mithila with her father. He had always encouraged her to get involved in the affairs of the state. In addition, her mother once told her that, 'if you can run home well, you can conquer the world!'(Kane,182). Each woman should take some inspiration from Urmila and try to balance her personal and professional life with equal care. Kane gives Urmila the feminist trait as in the contemporary world women are excelling in the different professions, creating their individual identity rather than to be known by their spouses.

Urmila was a true leader and activist. When Bharat and Shatrughan returned from Kekeya. They became aware of the fact that it was due to Kaikesi's stubbornness that Ram was sent for fourteen years of exile and king Dashrath died of the same grief. Out of guilt Bharat decides to make his mother suffer the same

grief that queen Kaushalya and Sunaina were bearing silently after departing from their sons. But it was Urmila who make him realize that besides being a brother and a son he is a husband too. She firmly takes stand for her sister Mandavi and tells

Bharat that, 'And in the process of hurting your mother, you shall hurt your wife too. Please don't let Mandavi suffer the same fate as me...' (Kane,193) additionally she gently reminds him about his responsibility. 'And who'll rule the kingdom, Bharat?' (Kane, 193). Furthermore, when Bharat pronounces that he would fast unto death to get Ram back, Urmila sharply stops him, 'Don't speak nonsense!' 'Haven't we had enough tragedies that you seek another one? Be fair to yourself and Mandavi.' (Kane,207). Like a true feminist she upholds her sister's dignity.

Urmila's decision-making quality was remarkable. When everyone gets to know about Mantara's devilish intentions and wanted to punish her Urmila suggests that 'the dark dungeons below are the best place for her. She can plot and scheme amongst the rodents and the cobwebs...' (Kane,199). This shows Urmila's smartness as this punishment would restrict Mantara from corruption of more minds and sickness. Urmila was a very resilient person. When Mantara asks for forgiveness she replies with firmness, 'As I once told you, I don't waste time doing idle talk with subordinates.' (Kane,199-200) and she ruthlessly orders guards to take her away. This event also emphasizes Urmila's feminist traits as she was smart and thoughtful in making decisions as she leaves people around her astounded.

Urmila was brave and strong. She never bowed down upon her condition rather faced her hardships with bravery. Sita remarks to her, 'My Brave little sister you were there all alone, strong, and silent and supportive. Even if I tried and were

able to face life the way you do, I could never match up to your indomitable spirit and your sheer will. I can never be as strong as you, Urmil. (Kane,211)

Lakshman praises his wife for her courage and valor and addresses her as ‘strong, stable, and dependable like a fierce lioness protecting her family. Playing the roles of the beautiful daughter, shrewd administrator, wise peacemaker simultaneously...(Kane,214). Urmila never loathed over her situation as during her conversation she mentions to Lakshman ‘it is all about living through the choices we made.’ (Kane, 215). This also supplements her feminist quality.

When Bharat along with three mother queens, Shatrughan and Urmila goes to Chitrakoot to request Ram to return Ayodhya to take over the kingdom, Ram refuses to return on the pretext that he was fulfilling his dharma as a son. Hearing this Bharat decides to live in forest and do his penance as a hermit on the banks of River Sarayu at Nandigram. This boils Urmila into fury and wrath as she did not want Mandavi to face the same fate as her and Sita. As a contemporary Indian woman, she adapted to the new environment of Ayodhya, but she never let herself be unheard. Although it was expected of women to be submissive, she questioned authority whenever it was needed. During this event Urmila asks ‘today in this room we have talked about all sorts of Dharma-of the father and the sons, of the kings and the princes, of the Brahmin and the kshatriya, even of the wife for her husband. but is there no Dharma of the husband for his wife? No dharma of a son for his mother? Is it always about the father, sons, and brothers? (Kane,219). She believed in equality of sexes. She criticises the male dominance and power in all sorts of social affairs. Her fundamental questioning ability shakes the patriarchal structure. Lakshman addresses her as *warrior wife* due to her fierce nature.

Urmila is the most influential character in *Sita's Sister*. She is expected to be submissive and selfless in the patriarchal domain. Patriarchy abuses women if she thinks for herself and her wellbeing. Irrespective of her likes and dislikes a woman is expected to follow her husband's commands. But Urmila stands as strong as iron speaks out her thoughts and feelings. During the argument when Urmila questions the dharma of a husband and a son Guru Kashyap tries to suppress her as he had no answer for her question. But Urmila in her reply to guru Kashyap reveals the true status of women in Ayodhya and how they were treated. 'You are right, Guru Kashyap, Ayodhya is not Mithila,' adding to her point she says 'Mithila does not treat her women so shabbily. And unlike sage Gargi in my father's royal court, I did not receive any answer to my questions. Not that I expected any!'(Kane,223). This shows that women were not given equal opportunity as man to put forth their point and were forced to be silent in Ayodhya. Whereas in Mithila women had more freedom and could participate in any conversation freely.

Although Urmila tries her best to change Bharat's mind of going for a penance she fails, and Mandavi is forced to face the same fate like Urmila. However, there is vast difference between both sisters the way they choose to live their life after being distanced from their husbands. Mandavi prefers to cage herself in a private room, restricting her interaction with the outside world but on the other side Urmila who faces equal sorrow chooses to make her life more resourceful. She learns Vedas and Upanishads under the guidance of royal gurus and other times she spends on her paintings. She keeps herself busy with some or the other work. She tries to reunite her broken family. Although Urmila was the youngest of all the sisters, she advises her sisters and helps them to lead their life in a positive light.

Mandavi was an avid reader so Urmila encourages her to read books during her free time as it would keep her mind occupied, and she would be able to make best use of it. She advises Mandavi to fill her life with positivity rather than thinking about unpleasant negative memories. This also sheds light on Urmila's feminist traits as she tries to raise other women rather than leaving her in besotted situations.

Kane writes 'She was Urmila, not just the woman of passion as her name so defined her but one whose heart and mind had come together in intellectual and spiritual enrichment'. (Kane,269). She participated in scholarly conferences and supplemented her husbands and father's pride. In the novel King Janak defines her as a child with a curious mind, a kind heart and clarity of ideas and expressions which she knew how to use wisely even as a child.

Urmila's wait and patience deserves much respect. It shows her independent and free spirit. Her narratives throw light on the struggles and sacrifices faced by women under the patriarchal structure while supporting their husbands. Urmila's journey encourages a critical analysis of women in marriage. Urmila's character critiques the patriarchal norms which controls the women's agency and autonomy. But Urmila's character illustrates will and potential for transformation even within deeply rooted patriarchal norms.

3.4. THEMES IN SITA'S SISTER

3.4.1. AGENCY AND AUTONOMY

In *Sita's Sister*, the theme of agency is central to the narrative, particularly concerning the female characters' ability to make choices and exert control over their own lives within the constraints of their societal roles.

Throughout the novel, female characters such as Sita, Urmila, and Mandavi actively assert their autonomy and agency in various ways, despite the patriarchal expectations imposed upon them. They make decisions, take actions, and pursue their own goals, demonstrating their capacity to shape their own destinies. For example, when Kaikeyi decides to remarry Ram, instead of being a mute victim Sita upholds agency and doesn't let others decide her fate. Although it was natural for a king or Prince to take more than one wife, Sita retorts that, 'Yes, it happens in many royal families, but it won't happen with me!'(Kane,100). Secondly when Ram was sent to exile, he refuses to take Sita with him, but she sharply commands him to take her with him. Rather than pleading before Ram to take her she makes a statement. She articulates it with stinging succinctness.

Mandavi also asserts her agency because like her sisters she doesn't approve of marrying Bharat immediately but rather asks King Janak for time to come up with a definite decision. Urmila shows her agency throughout the novel. She doesn't allow herself to be crushed under patriarchy but uses her intelligence and fights all the odds in her life. These female characters face limitations on their freedom and opportunities due to their gender, caste, and social status, yet they find ways to assert themselves and pursue their aspirations within these constraints.

Their quest for self-actualisation is central to the theme of agency despite the challenges they face, the female characters strive to realize their potential and pursue their passions, whether it's through intellectual pursuits, political engagement, or personal growth. For example, Urmila participates in political affairs of Ayodhya in the absence of four princes of Ayodhya. She attends scholarly conferences and learns Vedas and Upanishads fulfilling her intellectual pursuits.

Overall, *Sita's Sister* portrays agency as a fundamental aspect of female experience, depicting characters who navigate the complexities of their societal roles while asserting their autonomy and striving for self-determination. Through their actions and choices, the characters exemplify the resilience and strength of individuals who refuse to be defined by external constraints.

3.4.2. THEME OF EMPOWERMENT

The female characters in *Sita's Sister* illustrate the concept of empowerment by navigating social norms, questioning patriarchy, and asserting their autonomy in a variety of fields.

The female characters in *Sita's Sister* demonstrate advocacy and leadership abilities while navigating the political, social, and familial realms. They actively participate in the decision-making process, fight for their rights, and work to bring about constructive change in their surroundings.

Education and enlightenment are depicted as pathways to empowerment for female characters in the novel. King Janak can be called as a feminist father as he gave his daughters freedoms to pursue their interests empowering them. Characters like Sita and Urmila seek knowledge and intellectual growth, empowering themselves through education and self-discovery. Even after getting married Urmila pursue her intellectual pursuits under the guidance of scholarly Gurus.

In the face of oppression and societal expectations, characters' attempts to recover their identities and agency are also included in the novel's topic of empowerment. Characters claim their autonomy and right to exist according to their own terms through actions of self-expression and self-affirmation. For example,

Urmila creates an identity solely by herself. She is respected more as scholar and capable character.

Sita's Sister presents a nuanced exploration of empowerment, depicting the transformative journeys of its female characters as they navigate complex social dynamics, confront patriarchal structures, and assert their agency in pursuit of liberation and self-actualization. This allows feminist exploration of the novel.

3.4.3 SISTERHOOD AND RELATIONSHIP

Urmila, Sita, Mandavi, and Shrutkirti were the four princesses of Mithila who were adorable and had an unbreakable bond with each other. Although they were not true siblings their love for each other was not less than that of the blood sisters. Four sisters never failed to appreciate each other and criticize their vices and faults.

Urmila's relationships with her other sisters, particularly Mandavi, Shrutakirti, and Sita, highlight the importance of sisterhood and solidarity among women. Urmila's relationships with Sita and her other sisters play a crucial role in her feminist journey, contributing to her character development and the exploration of feminist themes. Urmila's relationship with her sister Sita is complex and multifaceted. While Sita is portrayed as the epitome of virtue and sacrifice in the Ramayana, Urmila's character provides a contrasting perspective.

Despite being overshadowed by Sita's prominent role as the wife of Lord Rama, Urmila harbours no resentment towards her sister. Instead, she supports and admires Sita, demonstrating a sense of sisterly solidarity. As Urmila witnesses Sita's struggles and sacrifices, she begins to question the societal norms and expectations placed upon women, inspiring her own feminist awakening. For example, Urmila reserves no hard feelings for Sita when Sita mistakes Lakshman's loyalty towards

her and Ram thinking Lakshman wanted to get her and the throne of Lanka and because of which he was not ready to leave Sita alone at the hut and rescue Ram. Instead, Urmila realized the intensity of the situation and gave her assurance that her love for Lakshman was much stronger than these weak thoughts. Additionally, their bond was so strong that characters like Mantara failed to strain their relationship with each other.

Throughout the novel Urmila's sisters stand by her side during the challenging time. With the help of her sisters Urmila breaks the stereotypes asserting her autonomy and showcasing her resilience. All the sisters could go miles for each other and could fight or kill anyone if needed. For example, even though Urmila harboured love for Lakshman, she was ready to kill him when she mistook the demon for Sita in disguise. Additionally, even Mandavi was ready to kill Lakshman for causing pain to Urmila by refusing to marry her. This shows that these sisters shielded each other and safeguarded each other's happiness.

3.4.5 SUBVERSION OF STEREOTYPES

Kavita Kane in *Sita's Sister* subverts stereotypes, and it is evident through the portrayal of female characters who defy traditional gender norms and expectations. The novel presents characters with complex personalities and desires. For example, Urmila is shown as a warrior and strategist, actively challenging the stereotype of women being passive and weak. She has departed from her traditional depiction of Ramayana.

Independence and strength were two qualities most associated with men. Same qualities are illustrated by Urmila in *Sita's Sister* which was unusual for a

female in ancient society. Kane presents Urmila as a resilient and independent character who subverts traditional expectations. Urmila participates in decision making processes of Ayodhya in the absence of Ram, Lakshman, Bharat, and Shatrughan. Secondly, the novel delves into the complex relationship of sisters, especially Sita and Urmila. Kane uses the theme of sisterhood to explore and support different ways in which women support and uplift each other in the face of patriarchy. By pressing over their connections Kane highlights the strength derived from female solidarity and further challenges the notion of women as secluded figure.

Urmila confronts societal injustices time in time. This subversion of the stereotype of the docile wife emphasizes Sita's agency and autonomy. Kane depicts female characters in Sita's Sister as working in a variety of professions and jobs outside the home. For example, Urmila's engagement in military tactics and Mandavi's endeavours in administration subvert the notion that women are primarily meant to handle domestic duties.

The novel challenges conventional beauty standards by celebrating the inner strength and intelligence of its female characters over their physical appearance. This subversion highlights the importance of qualities like intelligence, courage, and resilience, rather than solely focusing on external beauty. Sita's Sister effectively subverts stereotypes by presenting its female characters as dynamic and empowered individuals who defy traditional gender norms and expectations, thereby advocating for a more inclusive and equitable society.

The novel advocates for women's rights and gender equality by challenging patriarchal conventions and authority through the decisions and actions of its

female protagonists. The book questions the power structures that uphold gender inequity in society by challenging stereotypes. Urmila is given a rich inner life by Kane, who highlights her emotional nuance and intellectual brilliance. The author dispels myths about women's limited ability to engage deeply emotionally and intellectually through Urmila. The reflective and contemplative nature of Urmila offers a contrast to the traditional representations of female characters in the epic.

CHAPTER 4- SUBVERTING PATRIARCHAL STEREOTYPES - WOMEN

EMPOWERMENT

4.1 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS

The term gender refers to the binary of men and women in society. It is often used as a synonym of sex, referring to males and females according to their genetic differences. Sex is biological in nature, and it is attributed to physical and physiological features. Whereas gender is socially constructed roles that define men and women and gender diverse people. It is not static and can change over time.

In patriarchal society men make decisions in spheres of life including governance and family matters. They are considered superior to women mentally, socially, and physically. Quality of control, rationality, and competitiveness was identified with men. Such stereotypes aid in maintaining a long established and biased outlook towards women. Which further justifies violence and discrimination against women.

Patriarchal society grants all sorts of power to men. They are vocal and have the upper hand in the social sphere. They are considered to be more intelligent and non-emotional, further adding to their muscularity. One of the most important

features of patriarchy is the discrimination against women. Women are subjected to economic, social, and political discrimination within and outside their family. Due to lack of freedom and opportunity women failed to raise their standards.

Characteristics or traits that are regarded as suitable for men and women are called 'gender stereotypes.' such traits restrict men and women in a box defining their masculinity and femininity. Promoting gender equality will allow boys and girls to be themselves and follow their interests irrespective of gender identities.

This will support in creating an equitable and inclusive society.

4.2 TRADITIONAL GENDER STEREOTYPES

In traditional Indian civilization, patriarchal rules were profoundly embedded and shaped the social, political, and familial dynamics. In all aspects of life, including politics and domestic affairs, men held the position of primary authority and influence. Second, gender roles have been set in concrete. Women were limited to domestic tasks like childrearing, caring for others, and managing the home, while men were expected to provide for and safeguard their families. It was expected of women to put family responsibilities ahead of their own goals in life.

In ancient Indian society, marriage was regarded as the most important institution. Most of them were set up by family elders, and people had little to no say in who they paired with. Marriage was viewed as a way to reinforce ties, maintain ancestral lineage, and provide financial security, with women supposed to be submissive mothers and partners.

Compared to men, women's access to economic and educational

possibilities was restricted. Social conventions and expectations limited their autonomy, and their roles were mainly restricted to the home. The patriarchal standards prevalent in ancient Indian civilization influenced the experiences of women, limiting their agency, autonomy, and opportunity for expressing oneself and make independent choices.

It was expected of women to submit to and be obedient to male authority figures, such as spouses, fathers, and later sons. Their wishes and opinions were frequently viewed as secondary. Women were supposed to maintain ideas of modesty and purity, and their behaviour and clothing were subject to stringent rules of behaviour.

4.3. PORTRAYAL OF FEMALE CHARACTERS BEYOND SURPANAKHA AND URMILA.

4.3.1 TARAKA

Taraka emerges as a strong female character in Lanka's Princess whose presence significantly influences Surpanakha's life choices and decisions. Taraka is Surpanakha's grandmother and serves as a mother figure to Surpanakha in *Lanka's Princess*. Taraka nurtures and guides in such a way that further shapes Surpanakha's worldview.

Taraka embodies an independent spirit and challenges traditional gender roles and societal norms. She rejects the idea that women should stick to some prescribed roles and limitations that include cooking and serving the household. Taraka always taught Meenakshi about oneself and remarked “You make the world believe what you are, not believe what the world believes of you.” (Kane, 23). This

very statement by Taraka reflects her free spirit, confidence and also emphasis on self-love. She taught Surpanakha to embrace her beauty. “Never be ashamed of your body, your Femininity, Meenu...” (Kane, 22). “Beauty lies in your head and heart; you have to believe it. But for that first you have to love yourself...(Kane,22). These are important revelations that Taraka makes to Surpanakha so that Surpanakha doesn't feel ashamed of her physical appearance but accepts it and loves it. Moreover, through her communication, Taraka implies that beauty doesn't mean how to look from the outside, but it is more about one's personality and individuality. One should love himself or herself first to be loved by others.

Even though Taraka was a wretched woman she understood the rightful duty of the parents and blamed Rishi Vishravas and Kaikesi for their negligence towards their daughter and her growing insecurity about her body. Meenakshi knew what beauty meant and implied as she was brought up among the most beautiful people including her brothers. But it is Taraka her Nani who changed her notion about beauty and made her realise that beauty lies within.

Taraka recognises the power of knowledge and empowerment and decides to teach Meenakshi sorcery. Her insistence on intellectual empowerment aligns with feminist principles of equality and agency. Although she had wicked plans behind her motif, she teaches Meenakshi magic. This promotes Surpanakha's intellectual development, and by doing so Taraka challenges the societal norms that seek to suppress women's education and autonomy because through Taraka Meenakshi gets to learn what her interest lies in.

4.3.2 KAIKESI

Kaikesi demonstrated independence by making her own decisions, particularly in a male-dominated society for example she marries Rishi Vishravas even though she belonged to the Asura clan thus breaking societal norms. She is portrayed as intellectually strong and capable of critical thinking and strategic planning for example she says, “I married Vishravas, so that I could beget the best progeny, the most powerful and the most wise to win back what we have lost.” (Kane, 01). This quality of critical thinking and strategic planning was traditionally associated with males. Though Kaikesi was cunning she used her intelligence and wit to manipulate situations to her advantage.

She plays a significant role in shaping Ravan's destiny and the future of Lanka by orchestrating events to advance her family's power. Further Kaikesi challenges traditional gender roles by actively participating in political discussions and decision-making processes. she chooses her groom which was unusual in olden times. Her actions go against the typical expectations of the society.

Kaikesi possesses agency over her life, asserting her autonomy and refusing to be defined solely by her relationship with men. She displayed courage in the face of adversity, fearlessly confronting obstacles and stood up for what she believed in. Alongside her strength and determination, she embodies compassion and empathy, showing concern for well-being of others and to protect her family.

Kaikesi had four children: three sons named Ravan, Vibhishan, and Kumbhakarna, and a daughter named Meenakshi (Surpanakha), who was the youngest. Kaiseki never listened to her husband's accusations unnecessarily. She always spoke confidently and snorted dismissively at her husband. But Kaikesi was also a victim of patriarchy who followed few traditional narratives.

4.3.3 MANDODARI

Mandodari is depicted as the queen of Lanka, the wife of Ravana, and the mother of his children. Unlike other portrayals of Mandodari, Kane's depiction presents her as more than just a passive observer or victim of her husband's actions. Instead, Mandodari is portrayed as a woman of intelligence, courage, and resilience who navigates the patriarchal society of her time with grace and strength.

Mandodari's political skills and intelligence are two aspects of her persona that highlight her feminist attributes. Though Mandodari lives in a male-dominated society, she is depicted as a smart and intelligent queen who is instrumental in guiding her husband and influencing Lanka's politics. She is not merely a silent bystander but an active participant in decision-making, often offering wise counsel to Ravana even when he disregards her opinions.

Furthermore, Mandodari's resilience in the face of adversity demonstrates her feminist spirit. Mandodari maintains her spirit and self-respect despite Ravana's illicit behaviour as well as her personal hardships. She refuses to be defined as Ravana's wife alone by asserting her agency and independence.

Other than that, Mandodari's feminist sensibilities are shown by her kindness and understanding for the other women in the narrative. Even though Rama's wife Sita is her husband's prisoner, she treats Sita with kindness. Despite their different situations, Mandodari shows sympathy with her fellow women by understanding Sita's predicament as a woman caught in the middle of a battle that was not her fault.

Mandodari uses Ravan's ego as her weapon when he drags Sita to Lanka. She used her intelligence to keep Sita away from Ravan. Back in time it was considered as sin or bad omen to force women or seize any woman against her will. Mandodari's sharp comments pins Ravan's ego and he orders Trijata to escort Sita to Ashok Garden. Mandodari's kindness towards Sita is reflected during her conversation with Surpanakha she says, 'If I can protect Sita or any other woman in any way, I shall...' (Kane, 219)

Secondly when Mandodari loses all her sons in the war her outburst comments on her inner conflict and struggle as a woman. It shows how woman faced injustice in the face of patriarchy. She questions the injustice served to them as a woman. She asks Ravan, while we women suffer a living death as your wife, your mother, your sister, your daughter-in-law! Have you ever thought of *us* ? What you did to us and what will happen to us once all's over? Meant by their glorious death on the battlefield but is it glory or grief for us? (Kane,260). Through Mandodari Kavita Kane echoes the pain of every woman who becomes victim of grief due to her husband's actions, a woman loses everything to fulfil her dharma as a mother and a wife.

Mandodari in 'Lanka's Princess' shows herself to be a feminist figure who challenges society standards and expectations in order to claim her own agency and autonomy. As a source of strength and empowerment for contemporary readers, Mandodari defies the conventional image of women in ancient mythology with her brilliance, determination, and generosity.

4.3.4 SULOCHANA AND VAJRAMALA

Vajramala was the wife of Kumbha. Although she becomes a victim of patriarchy. When Kumbha dies on the battlefield, she doesn't want to seek revenge on Ram and Lakshman. She takes great pride in calling herself, "I am a warrior's wife..." (Kane,262) even Sulochana, Ravan's daughter in law calls herself as a *warrior's wife* she was made a widow and had to face despair in silence. But Sulochana was strong and bold; she goes to get back Indrajit's (Meghnad) dead body from the battlefield. Both these minor characters show resilience and confidence in their actions.

4.3.5 SITA

In *Lanka's Princess* by Kavita Kane, Sita is portrayed as a feminist character who challenges traditional gender roles and expectations. Throughout the novel, Sita demonstrates resilience, agency, and independence in the face of adversity.

Firstly, Sita refuses to conform to the passive, submissive role typically assigned to women in ancient Indian society. Despite being portrayed as the ideal wife in the Ramayana, in Kane's retelling, Sita is depicted as a strong and assertive woman who stands up for herself and others. She challenges societal norms by questioning authority and advocating for her own desires and rights. She states her opinion and wishes loud and clear.

Secondly, Sita exhibits agency and autonomy in her decisions and actions. Unlike the traditional portrayal of Sita as a victim of circumstance, Kane's Sita takes control of her own destiny. She actively participates in shaping the events around her, whether it's expressing her love for Rama or standing up to Ravana

during her captivity in Lanka. Sita's agency is evident in her unwavering commitment to her principles and her refusal to compromise her integrity, even in the face of temptation and danger. In *Sita's Sister* She strongly decides to accompany Ram in an exile despite of his refusal.

Secondly in *Sita's Sister* when Sunaina calls off the marriage, Sita opposes it most fiercely. She was strong and decisive. Sita was like a peach apparently soft and delicate but hard and strong from within. (Kane, *Sita's Sister* 78). Her determination was iron strong. she chooses to marry Ram or decides not to marry at all of not with Ram.

Furthermore, Sita's resilience and strength in the face of adversity highlight her feminist qualities. Despite enduring hardships such as exile, abduction, and imprisonment, Sita maintains her dignity and inner strength. She refuses to be defined by her suffering and instead draws upon her inner resources to overcome challenges and persevere.

Additionally, Sita challenges traditional notions of femininity by displaying qualities typically associated with masculinity, such as courage, determination, and leadership. She proves herself to be a capable and resourceful individual, capable of taking charge and making difficult decisions when necessary.

Overall, in *Lanka's Princess* and *Sita's Sister* Kavita Kane presents Sita as a feminist character who defies societal expectations and asserts her agency and autonomy. Through her portrayal of Sita, Kane offers readers a refreshing reinterpretation of a classic mythological figure, one who embodies strength, resilience, and empowerment.

4.3.6 SUNAINA

Sunaina was the mother of Urmila and Sita. She is one of the strong feminists who critiques the patriarchal norms. One can identify traits of modern Indian woman through her behaviour and liberal perspective. She was a rational being. As Kane writes, she was a woman of strong opinions and did not hesitate to voice them.

(Kane, 54, Sita's Sister).

Sunaina was liberal in thought which indicates modern woman's thought. She did not believe in rules and regulations governed by social conditions and favoured a personal philosophy of individual progress and private freedom and choice. (Kane, 79 Sita's Sister). She supported her daughter's decision and stood firm behind her daughters.

‘Suffering silently is not strength; it is weakness. Why did you not stand up for your rights?’ (Kane, Sita’s Sister, 183) these words are uttered by Sunaina which convey her sense of justice and empowerment. Sunaina was resilient and self sufficient and these traits of hers are inherited by her daughters which help them to live their life with positivity and stand for their rights.

4.3.7 KAUSHALYA, KAIKEYI, AND SUMITRA

Kaushalya was a dignified lady and the mother of Ram. She was the oldest queen of king Dashrath. She was a great queen and a woman with dignity. She supports Ram in serving his interest. But as a woman she fights her own battles with great courage. She was made to accept Kaikeyi and Sumitra as King Dashrath's wives and she quietly accepted it. This reflects how women were made to face injustice in the male dominated society.

Kaikeyi was actually a good mother who loved Ram more than anyone else, but Bharat was her actual son. Kaikesi dispels the myth that men are the only ones capable of winning battles. Kaikeyi once accompanied her husband to war with the powerful king Sambarasura. Her fierce talent, which was customarily associated with men, is demonstrated in this episode. She was also a very open and honest woman who thought everyone should know how she felt. She had an open personality. She has a strong opinion and acts with great directness. Talk that is direct and unambiguous. She was straightforward and genuine. She was a liberal and forthright person.

Though Kaikesi's character is made to sound negative she's the one who sacrifices the most to save her family. She faces hatred of her son Bharat, unpleasant comments from her husband who eventually dies from the heartbreak after Ram's leaves for exile. Without uttering a single word in justification of her actions she bares the hatred from almost all her family members. Ram's exile was preordained. After the death of king Dashrath the throne was to remain unoccupied fourteen years or else the misfortune would be carried on to the heir resulting in his subsequent death too. (Kane, 251. *Sita's Sister*). Kaikeyi played entire charade to save her family from the misfortune but received no good will but just wrath. This reflects on the woman's will and great sacrifice for her family. This proves the fact that a woman can put herself at stake to save and protect her family.

Sumitra was the youngest queen of king Dashrath. In the novel *Sita's Sister*, she is presented as a goddess of wisdom and tranquillity. Sumitra was a mother of Lakshman and Shatrughna. She is a great mother as she sends her son Lakshman to support his brother while in exile. She did not speak much and believed in

something done as opposed to something said. (Kane, 120, Sita's Sister). She had an immense emotional strength. She was not too shaken by Lakshman's departure and motivated Urmila to gather strength to face the circumstances. She bore the grief with a brave heart and a braver smile.

Sumitra was a reasonable woman. When Kaushalya accuses Bharat of treachery, it is Sumitra who sides for Bharat saying he was innocent. She never gives in to unreasonable accusations. Sumitra found happiness in small moments. She believed in seizing every chance to make it a better day and a better life.

Sumitra's role as a mother extends beyond her biological children. She serves as a mentor to her daughter-in-law Urmila. Through her interactions with Urmila, she offers her support emphasising on women's solidarity and empowerment. She maintains her dignity and devotion for her family throughout the novel. This highlights her resilience as a feminist character. Although she is less spoken, she plays a crucial role in Ramayana.

4.3.8 MANDAVI

Mandavi was sharp and politically astute. She was most ambitious amongst the sisters. Bharat's decision of leaving for Nandigram leaves her disheartened. Despite Urmila and Kirti's attempt to get their sister out from the sadness, Mandavi encloses herself in the cage of her private life. But when Urmila suggests Mandavi to follow the light that sparks within her and asks her to believe in herself. Mandavi was an avid reader and through the course of events she had forgotten her true self, but Urmila fills her with new hope and asks her to read more books to fill the void in her life. This incident proves successful in breaking the age-old saying that 'a woman is

another woman's worst enemy'. Instead of leaving her sister in dejected condition, Urmila lifts her up and provides her with new light to go ahead in her life.

Throughout the novel readers are provided with too many incidents that shows how women were made to face injustice. It also reflects on how women became victims because of the mistakes of the elder in the family. How in the game of jealousy and powerplay woman is made to face injustice and oppression.

4.4 DIVERSITY OF FEMALE EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES DEPICTED IN KANE'S NARRATIVES.

Kavita Kane's stories frequently delve into the diverse perspectives and life experiences of female characters, providing detailed visuals of their hardships and triumphs. Her novels *Sita's Sister* and *Lanka's Princess* offer nuanced exploration of female characters within the framework of Indian mythology. Through her narratives she shows depth and complexity of women lives. She sheds light on the unique journey of protagonists, highlighting different facets of their role in society. Through her storytelling, she gives voice to characters often relegated or sidelined by delving into various historical and mythological contexts. Kane enriches her narratives with depth and authenticity. In *Sita's Sister* and *Lanka's Princess* we see that Kane provides platform for the voices that were largely unheard.

In *Sita's Sister*, Kane examines the life of Urmila, Sita's younger sister, who is often relegated to the background in traditional retellings of the epic. Through Urmila's perspective, Kane explores themes of sacrifice, duty, and sisterhood. Urmila's story is one of resilience and strength as she willingly accepts her role as

the neglected wife of Lakshmana, choosing to remain behind while he accompanies his brother, Rama, into exile. Kane sensitively portrays Urmila's internal struggles and the emotional toll of her sacrifice, highlighting the complexities of her character beyond her traditional portrayal as a passive figure.

Similarly, in *Lanka's Princess*, Kane offers a fresh perspective on Surpanakha, the demon princess whose encounter with Rama and Lakshmana sets off a chain of events leading to the epic battle of the Ramayana. Through Surpanakha's eyes, Kane challenges the traditional narrative of the demoness as a one-dimensional villain, instead presenting her as a complex and misunderstood figure. Surpanakha's story is one of longing, rejection, and revenge, as she grapples with her identity and desires in a world dominated by patriarchal norms. Kane delves into Surpanakha's psyche, exploring the trauma of her past and the motivations behind her actions, ultimately humanizing a character often dismissed as monstrous.

What distinguishes Kane's depiction of female characters is her dedication to capture their autonomy and individuality. She explores the varied experiences of women in the Ramayana through Urmila and Surpanakha, dispelling myths and providing complex portrayals that appeal to contemporary readers. Instead of being helpless objects of fate, Kane's characters actively participate in their own narratives, negotiating complex social relationships and carving their own routes in a patriarchal society. She explores the themes of solidarity, sisterhood, agency, and empowerment through female characters.

Altogether, Kavita Kane's stories present a varied and complex picture of female lives and viewpoints. She dispels myths, challenges social norms, and

acknowledges the richness and resilience of women using her investigation of historical and mythological settings. By doing this, she challenges readers to reevaluate how they perceive women's social roles and the depth of their personal experiences.

Kavita Kane's *Sita's Sister* and *Lanka's Princess* offer a compelling exploration of the diverse experiences and perspectives of female characters within the framework of Indian mythology. Through the lives of Urmila and Surpanakha, Kane challenges stereotypes, humanizes marginalized figures, and amplifies the voices of women who have long been overlooked. In doing so, she enriches the tapestry of the Ramayana narrative and contributes to a more inclusive understanding of its characters and themes.

CHAPTER 5 – REIMAGINING MYTHICAL NARRATIVES THROUGH FEMINIST LENS

5.1 ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY

A survey was conducted as mentioned in the proposal to receive readers' reception about mythological retellings.

Indian novelist Kavita Kane is well-known for her fascinating retellings of myths and legends from Indian epics, which emphasize on the viewpoints of often ignored female characters. Within the context of ancient mythology, her works examine themes of identity, power dynamics, and the complex nature of human relationships. *Lanka's Princess* is Kavita Kane's well-known piece that explores the life of Surpanakha and offers a new take of Ramayana legend. *Sita's Sister*, is her another well-known book, retells the Ramayana tale of Urmila, Sita's younger sister, spotlighting her hardships and sacrifices.

Kane gives voice to female characters that have been marginalized or overshadowed in the original version of Ramayana. Her feminist retelling of

traditional Indian mythology makes her work relevant. She tackles the timeless issues that still appeal to the contemporary audience. She provides interesting opinions on the inner lives and experiences of these women.

Kavita Kane found herself interested in writing mythological retellings. She became highly fascinated by the mythological female characters who received the least attention and praise. Due to her interest Kane goes a step forward and becomes a woman with a mission.

All the survey responses show that Kavita Kane has immense impact on the readers. The questionnaire was circulated amongst the people who have read Kane's novels. There were altogether twenty questions asked. All the respondents answered the questions stating their opinions. The very first question was “have you read Kavita Kane's novels based on mythological retellings?” And almost everyone has read it.

Since Kavita Kane has authored more books besides Lanka's Princess and Sita's Sister respondents answered the questions accordingly. More than half of the respondents have read Sita's Sister. Small sum of respondents read other novels by Kavita Kane. More than one fourth of the respondents said that they read Lanka's Princess. In response to the third question, “What motivated you to read Kavita Kane's novels?” the responses gathered shows that maximum people read Kavita Kane's novels due to their interest in mythology, one fourth of the readers read these novels due to their interest in feminist literature, and very few read her work as it was recommended to them by their fellow friends. Most of the respondents believed that feminist themes are adequately represented in contemporary retellings by Kavita Kane and very few respondents were not fully agreeing with this notion.

Same response was gathered when asked, “Do believe that incorporating feminist perspectives in mythological retellings can lead to greater social awareness and inclusivity?”. Not surprising but every respondent felt that Kane's novels successfully address issues of agency, autonomy, and empowerment for its female characters.

Few subjective questions were asked and most of the responses were positive and thought provoking. Each novel by Kavita Kane has its influence on readers. One question was about which characters did the readers find most compelling or interesting? and respondents like various female characters from Kane's novels for various reasons. For example, one respondent liked the character of Uruvi because according to the respondent, she is portrayed as a bold, courageous woman who doesn't think twice before questioning wrong things. She is an outspoken person who does not believe in caste or discrimination factors. Another respondent stated that out of all Kane's book she liked Ahalya's character because she was very boldly and beautifully crafted in the book Ahalya's Awakening and it shows how women are targeted for anything and everything in the society. Another respondent liked character of Surpanakha and Mandodari as both the women questioned patriarchy firmly.

Most of the survey answerers were of opinion that they would recommend Kavita Kane novels to others due to various reasons. One respondent said he or she would highly recommend. Because by doing so, the readers will be able to look at the mythological stories from a fresh perspective. another respondent feels female retellings of mythologies is very important, it opens the horizon to have open discussions about the lack of inclusivity of female in such literature. Moreover, one

respondent believed that a lot of our belief systems have roots in our religious and cultural stories. The negative perspective of women can at least somewhat be blamed on our stories that constantly either villainize women or deify them.

According to the respondents Kavita Kane uses modern issues in mythological novels through which current issues are discussed in her novels. Secondly according to the readers her contribution is paramount. There are many authors who are writing feminist literature, however writing a female protagonist based on mythology helps us relate with the characters that have been ignored and trifled in the history. It opens new areas to ponder about and realize how little has been written about women in mythologies, especially in their voice or point of view.

Respondents feel Kavita Kane is different as she has given voice to lesserknown characters of mythology like Ahalya, Urmila, Menaka etc. Not only the virtuous but fallen women also get to voice their opinions in her books. According to them as a reader, we get to read their point of view. Moreover, readers say Kane carefully chooses her characters and the perspective. She does her homework before telling any story. Also, she gives us a perspective and at the same time leaves enough space to think and analyse on your own. Storytelling without tarnishing the original story is one of her greatest plus.

According to one reader Hindu mythology, although being inclusive of women, also places them in certain typology. Selflessness, even to the point of death is glorified. This casts pressure on women to be self-sacrificing by making mythological characters role models for them. Changing how these mythological characters are portrayed will also make women have more nuanced role models.

One respondent is so fascinated by Kane's writing that she thinks Kavita Kane's books exactly tell what a feminist is. She says women don't need to become man to achieve something. Women are already powerful just forgot to use it. We don't need to grow bodies like men or do heavy work as men do or anything that a man can do, we should do to prove us, women, strong. We are powerful in our own way, though we have delicate bodies and sensitive minds but that is what world needs. But feminine energy is strong willed, patience and has creativity. According to the same reader Kane's works are so powerful that the respondent feels her vocabulary isn't accurate to describe it. However, her books are different, and they retain feminine energy and doesn't show the women converted into a man just show us as strong and powerful. Kane's novels keep readers engaged with the text as She breaks the traditional version by giving her female characters liberal identity. They fight themselves and do not face injustice. Moreover, readers say, speaking of these uncovered women in mythology, gives a sense of freedom for the women who read the books now.

Talking about Lanka's Princess readers have highlighted that Kane shows how society has placed so much importance on external beauty that those who don't qualify as beautiful are mistreated and secluded. Surpanakha craved for love all her life, but because of her appearance she was mistreated. However, in the end, she did not stay quiet. She stood up for herself. They loved the way Lanka's princess was written- showing that no character is black or white. It showed the circumstances that shaped a person's personality and portrayed very well the struggles she had! Further, Kavita Kane's novels help to explore the diverse aspects of these overlooked characters by centring them. They like her way of expressing

feminine and masculine energy. They are perfectly balanced like ying and yang. Women don't have muscles, yet they are powerful. Men are powerful yet their woman is the source of their power.

The survey responses provided valuable insights on mythological retellings and its significance in the contemporary society. Majority of the respondents expressed their views regarding their favourite novel along with appreciating Kavita Kane for incorporating feminist perspectives in her texts. These responses underscores importance of mythology and its importance in contemporary society

5.2 Conclusion

Long sufferance was not strength; it was an affliction of the weak. (Kane,154).

Myth plays a crucial role in Indian society. They remain a source of inspiration from the beginning of time. Through Kavita Kane's novels *Lanka's Princess* and *Sita's Sister* one gets to learn that contemporary authors try to retell, and revisit mythology with different perspectives. Hindu epics such as Ramayana and Mahabharata were written by men because of which female issues are widely ignored. According to these myths women were considered to be the epitome of virtue, they were expected to be passive and patient. In Ramayana Sita is considered as the most ideal woman due to her submissive, subservient, and patient nature. But on the other hand, characters like Surpanakha are recognised as demoness or evil characters due to her rebellious actions.

In the epics of the Ramayana, female characters who were silent spectators are given a voice in their own narrative. *Lanka's Princess* narrates the tale of Surpanakha, the most well-known yet despised character in the Ramayana. She has

traditionally been portrayed as an evil person and a wicked woman. Kavita Kane delves deeply into Surpanakha's character in *Lanka's Princess*. Through the persona of Surpanakha, Kavita Kane has demonstrated how society values light skin and treats girls with darker complexion differently. She goes on to demonstrate the psychological effects that cruelty may have on kids.

According to Kane the complicated relationship Surpanakha had with her mother and brothers, as well as the obvious favouritism her mother displayed towards her boys, had a profound impact on the young girl's mind. Her mother and siblings criticized her about her dark complexion and terrible appearance in contrast to a fair complexion and attractive features. She was also the least fortunate child, often being rejected and disregarded. Her family members didn't think her decisions mattered. Her mother often showed partiality towards her brothers.

However, by firmly asserting female rights and choices, the strong-willed and independent Surpanakha liberated herself from the constraints of a society established by men. Because of her physical strength, she was able to defend herself. Her family members were devastated when she made decisions on her marriage and other aspects of her life due to her strong will and sharp intelligence. She constantly tried to assert her identity and originality, didn't shy away from expressing her body's desires, and opposed criticism of her character. Surpanakha was not a vampire of pure wickedness. The human aspect of Surpanakha is shown by Kane. Surpanakha liked everyone while experiencing discrimination. She loved her nephews and showed care for her sisters-in-law.

Her destiny was formed by her surroundings, which also made her into an ugly vamp. Surpanakha would not have destroyed Ravana if her parents had raised

her with the same love and respect that they had shown to Ravana. Despite being an independent woman, devoted mother, and passionate lover, Surpanakha was mistreated for the choices she made. The point where the Krishna reincarnation of Rama accepts and consoles Kubja is where the tale begins and finishes. Krishna's touch destroys all the misfortunes Surpanakha had in her previous life, including her disfigurement at the hands of Lakshmana on Rama's orders, her reincarnation, and the penance of her current life, in which she was born with a hunchback and had to endure discrimination and mockery. Krishna changed her twisted body into a new, beautiful, and lovely one.

The story of the Ramayana has traditionally been influenced by male domination, which has resulted in the male characters being raised above their female counterparts. Revision is a lens that allows writers to revise tales that have become established in history and mythology and see previously unrecognised heroines by giving them centre stage. These retellings motivated the need to question the established status quo and engage with the story of often overlooked characters in the epics like Ramayana.

Secondly, Kavita Kane's portrayal of Urmila in *Sita's Sister*. The storyline of Urmila questions conventional thinking and presents a novel interpretation of women's roles in classical Indian mythology. The agency, autonomy, and rejection of patriarchal conventions exhibited by Urmila offer a new perspective on the position of women in ancient Indian mythology. The present study enhances our comprehension of gender viewpoints and highlights their enduring relevance in contemporary contexts. This contributes even more to the larger conversation on gender perspectives in literary works, highlighting their ongoing significance in

gender studies and conversations today. Achieving true equality and inclusivity in our cultures requires us to embrace gender views. By acknowledging the wide variety of identities and experiences that occur throughout the gender spectrum, we can endeavour to demolish damaging preconceptions, prejudices, and assumptions.

Hence the hypothesis is proved that Kavita Kane's depiction of mythological female characters brings out current feminist issues and presents traditionally deviating perspectives of mythology which are relevant to literature. Her novels explore the diverse perspectives of female characters.

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Appendix

Questionnaire used to collect data from the respondents.

1. Have you read Kavita Kane's novels based on mythological retellings?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
2. If yes, which novel have you read?
 - ☐ Lanka's Princess
 - ☐ Sita's Sister
 - ☐ Other
3. What motivated you to read Kavita Kane's novels?
 - ☐ Interest in mythology
 - ☐ Interest in feminist literature
 - ☐ Other
4. Do you believe that feminist perspectives are adequately represented in the contemporary retellings by Kavita Kane?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Maybe
5. Do you believe that incorporating feminist perspectives in mythological retellings can lead to greater social awareness and inclusivity?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Maybe

6. Do you believe that Kane's novels successfully address issues of agency, autonomy and empowerment for its female characters?

☐ Yes

☐ No

7. Which character(s) you find most compelling or interesting in the novel(s) you read and why?

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8. Would you recommend the novel(s) you read to others interested in feminist literature or retellings of Hindu mythology? Why or why not?

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9. How do you think Kane's novels contribute to ongoing discussions about feminist perspectives in literature, particularly within the realm of Hindu mythology?

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10. Is there anything specific you would like to highlight or comment on regarding the novel(s) you read?

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